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The overseas Taiwanese in Belize

An exploration of a South-South development project in a Belizean context

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Abstract

Purpose – The paper aims to give an account to describe the way the South-South development programme is realized between Taiwan and Belize.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper is the result of ethnographic fieldwork research combined with a literature study.

Findings – The development of the newly industrialized country Taiwan can be characterized by a drastic transformation from an impoverished agrarian society towards an affluent industrial economy. Now, Taiwan is aiming to help other developing countries to walk the same path by drawing lessons from their so-called “Taiwan experience”. In order to transfer their experience, Taiwan has established an overseas development organization, the International Cooperation and Development Fund. This organization offers development assistance to countries of which Taiwan receives political recognition. Central and South America are the regions where most of Taiwan’s diplomatic ties exist. One of the recipients of Taiwanese assistance in this area is Belize, a small English speaking, Central American country in the Caribbean Sea, with a multi-ethnic, densely populated, relatively poor population.

Research limitations/implications – Future research might examine the ways in which these Taiwanese farmers have integrated in Belize and how their entrepreneurial activities contribute in this process.

Practical implications – After visiting Taiwan’s project sites in Belize and interviewing government officials, Taiwanese-Belizeans, Belizean farmers, and non-farmers, it was found that much of what the Taiwanese brought was indeed considered beneficial, although incomplete. The links between the Taiwanese development organization and the wider society, Belize, were not clearly developed at the time, not least because of the problems in communicating with the Taiwanese development workers (for instance due to language issues). It would be wrong to suggest, however, that Taiwan’s development project was only perceived as raising problems for it did have a positive impact.

Originality/value – Although the first Taiwanese project in Belize was launched in 1989 it has until recently received little attention. This paper explores the social impact of this development project from the Taiwanese in Belize.

Keywords Developing countries, Economic development, International cooperation, Project management, Taiwan, Belize

Paper type Research paper



Introduction

Development assistance constitutes one of the major international operations of the second half of the twentieth century. Within that time development assistance has been provided in a variety of contexts for motives ranging from the most humanitarian to the most overtly political (Dana, 2001; Rist, 2002, p. 1). The diversity of development

mechanisms, and motives for its provision, makes development assistance a wide and controversial topic. The rationale behind development assistance has been one of the main controversial themes in North-South relations. The north has constantly been criticized for using development assistance to project economic and political influence in the developing world[1]. Moreover, western states have been accused of using development assistance as a way of maintaining the post-independence relationship and practising influence in their former colonies (Bobiash, 1992, p. 1). There have been presented only a few examples of western countries with true philanthropic intentions in their development programs. The conditionalities and restrictions often attached to development activities, as a result of the prevailing political and economic motives, are often presented as the main explanations for the many failures of North-South development programs. In fact, despite 50 years of development assistance from the north, most developing countries remained on the margins of the international community. These development interventions have failed to diminish southern dependence on the developed world or increase changes towards development.

The aim to reduce (economic-) dependency of the developing world on the industrialized north has become one of the central objectives of the cooperation between developing countries, hence, South-South cooperation. A large and growing number of developing countries are now also providing development assistance to reduce dependence on expertise and technologies from the north. The influence of dependency theory on South-South cooperation is manifest in its objectives and terminology (Mihyo, 1990, p. 220). Central objectives of South-South cooperation are to reduce the gap between “centre and periphery” and to avoid “unequal exchange” inherent in North-South relations. South-South cooperation is used as a strategy to promote economic independency, increase self-reliance and improve bargaining power with developed countries (Bobiash, 1992, p. 6).

Although there are many forms of South-South cooperation such as trade and investment, development assistance is the most common form in which it occurs, especially in the form of technical cooperation. In the field of technical cooperation alone, a United Nations (UN) report lists 77 developing countries that are either providing or receiving this form of development assistance.

This idea of South-South cooperation was first rooted at the Afro-Asian Bandung Conference of 1955 (Mihyo, 1990, p. 220). Even though most African and Asian countries were still colonies at that time, commitments were made in which solidarity was considered both an objective and a tool for third world development. For over three decades, numerous third world organizations, statesmen and intellectuals have advocated greater South-South cooperation. Key proponents have been Tanzania’s Nyerere, Mexico’s Echeverria, and Malaysia’s Mahathir.

Many developing countries are providing development assistance ostensibly as an act of solidarity with other developing countries, and believe that this assistance is in some ways better applicable than that provided by the wealthier developed states (Szirmai, 2005). This premise is based on the conviction that developing countries face many common conditions and problems of underdevelopment; have a common interest in improving their position in the international system; and, in many cases, have complementary resources which can be used for their mutual benefit (Dana, 1996; Hamilton and Dana, 2008). The question is then whether development assistance from

the south is indeed an act of solidarity and more appropriate than assistance provided by the north.

Until now, an unambiguous answer cannot be given for the success of South-South cooperation has been mixed. In addition, different approaches of South-South development assistance have evolved. There is, however, a growing debate as to the validity of applying the term “developing country” to many of the southern donor countries. For instance, the newly industrializing countries have become major economic powers (Mahbubani, 2008). In fact, in many cases the differences between a southern donor and recipient may be just as profound as the differences between a northern donor and its recipient developing country.

A prime illustration of this is the donor country of this study, the newly industrializing country Taiwan. Even though Taiwan used to be a relatively poor country it now belongs to the most wealthiest nations on earth. Therefore, the question of the transferability of the Taiwan experience to other developing countries is a growing theme. There have been keen interest in whether lessons from Taiwan can be applied elsewhere (Ito, 1997). It could be argued that development assistance from Taiwan would be advantageous for the southern recipient country, because Taiwan knows what it is like to be poor. These proponents of South-South cooperation share the conviction that solutions from the south would be better suitable to developing countries in the south. Others (Chan, 1997; Szirmai, 2005), on the contrary, are convinced that the Taiwan experience is not transferrable at all. They argue that the success of Taiwan is due to a unique combination of domestic, political, geographical, and cultural historical factors and is therefore impossible to transfer.

By examining the Taiwanese development project in Belize, this paper adds to this development debate. Hence, agricultural technologies that worked well in Taiwan are now being introduced in the developing country Belize with a different cultural and physical environment. This study attempts to identify the essential characteristics of South-South development cooperation as it is actually applied. By exploring the export of the “Taiwan experience”, light is shed on South-South development assistance.

Methodology

The data presented in this paper are the result of an ethnographic research conducted in the Belize from March 2005 until August 2005. Since the research aims to provide an insight into the reality of a certain group of people (the Taiwanese farmers) within their everyday settings, several qualitative research methods were used to obtain information about the development project in this region. The research subject was approached as a case study with an intrinsic as well as an instrumental focus (Stake, 2003). This means that the case is used to provide an insight into this particular subject (the Belizean situation), as well as to facilitate the understanding of a more general issue (South-South development projects). The purpose of the study is to gain an understanding of the situation within its context, rather than generalization beyond (Stake, 2003). For this reason the choice was made to conduct qualitative ethnographic field research, during a period of six months. The best way to gain an insight in the daily practice of the farmers is through participant observation. By using a conversational method and a non-quantitative ethnographic strategy, general information was obtained and informants were selected for further questioning (Dana and Dana, 2005). The general information, combined with a document and literature study provided the researcher with a topic list for the open-ended, in-depth interviews. These interviews were

conducted with several types of informants. The largest group of informants contained the Taiwanese farmers, as these are the subject of the research. The interviews had an informal character and usually took place in the natural environment of the farmers. Beside this group of informants, some explorative interviews were conducted with a variety of government officials. These interviews were more structured and formal.

The informants from the first group were selected with help of our Taiwanese key informant. The informants of the second group were selected and approached according to their function within the government.

This paper starts by giving an overview of Belizean context followed by a description of the economic situation of this country. Special attention will be given to the Taiwanese development organization, the International Cooperation and Development Fund (ICDF) – Taiwan in Belize. This description will lead on to the local responses towards ICDF in Belize illustrated with case descriptions of governmental responses and non farmers and farmer's responses. The paper ends with a conclusion of the findings.

The context: Belize

Belize is a relative small country (22.965 square kilometer) which is enclosed by Mexico in the north and by Guatemala in the west and south. Although, geographically located in Central America the country (especially the coastal area) has a Caribbean vibe and is considered as a part of the Caribbean basin (Roessingh *et al.*, 2005). Belize is situated in Central America, nevertheless, in contrast to the other countries in the region, the official language of Belize is English, a heritage of British colonial rule. Belize was a British colony from 1862 until 1981 (Shoman, 1987), in June of 1973 the name of the country was changed from British Honduras to Belize. This can be seen as a first consequence of self-government, and a first step towards independence. Although Belize gained self-government in 1973, it was not until the 21st of September 1981 that Belize received its independence. While Belize has been independent for 25 years, it is still part of the British commonwealth, today merely a ceremonial task – the Queen of Great Britain is officially still the head-of-state for Belize and the prime-minister of Belize is governing the country on her behalf.

The country has a multi-ethnic population consisting of, amongst others, Mestizos, Creoles, Garinagu, Maya's, Mennonites, Taiwanese, Chinese, and east Indian (Sutherland, 1998). The Maya people are thought to be one of the first inhabitants of Belize. Most of them were farmers then, and they still are today (Bolland, 1988). The Mennonites came to Belize from Mexico around 1958. These Swiss-German descendants came to Belize in search for cheap land and a place where they could live in isolation from the wider community (Roessingh, 2007). The Creole population used to be a majority in the country but due to the Central American immigration (and Creole emmigration to the USA) these proportions have drastically changed. Currently, the Mestizo population is in the majority in the country.

After independence Belize has been receiving the most foreign population within the whole Central American region. Moreover, nowadays about 15 percent (2,000 est.) of the Belizean population consists of foreigners (Ayanegui and Vittrap, 2000) First, there have been major streams of refugees and displaced persons fleeing from war in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras (Palacio, 1990, p. 16). They had been coming into Belize before that, but now they came in with greater numbers. The Belizean Refugee Department reported that an estimated 30,000 Central American refugees entered Belize.

In a country with a small population of approximately 301,000 inhabitants (Belizean Government, 2008) developments like this are not unnoticed. Even though the economic assimilation went quite well, the social integration did not. Moreover, there even emerged negative perceptions and tensions. There are several reasons for the negative picture of the immigrants for neighbouring Central American countries. First of all, they are blamed for taking the jobs of Belizeans, since they work for lower wages than the official wages (Roessingh, 2001, p. 21). Besides, that, since the Central American immigrants came in with such great numbers, the whole ethnic proportions in Belize have changed. This is one of the reasons that they are disliked, which might be an understatement, since they are called “Aliens” in the language of the people. Yet another consequence is that nowadays only 54.3 percent of the population speaks proper English and 45.7 percent speaks it badly or not. Moreover, 43.8 percent of the population speaks proper Spanish (Roessingh, 2001, p. 44).

Economic situation

Belize is not a very rich country and natural resources are scarce. In spite of this, its economic position is quite favourable in comparison to other countries in the region such as El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua (Popma and Van Spijk, 2008). The country had to deal with many economic setbacks once it had acquired independence. In this period (the eighties), Belize’s export consisted mainly of products from the agricultural industry, such as sugar, molasses, citrus fruits, and bananas. Owing to high oil prices, low sugar prices, and a declining world market, the country was on the verge of bankruptcy in 1981 (Barry, 1995, p. 39). Recently, Belize depends largely on the economic situation in the USA. Much of the agricultural produce is exported to the USA (Barry, 1995). Owing to the fact that the Belizean dollar is linked to the US dollar, the current economic set back in the USA hits Belize hard, making it economically very fragile.

Independent Belize is a typical example of a developing country facing the challenges of post-colonialism, immigration flows, and multiculturalism. Belize is linked to the world through the media, is influenced by strong transnational movements and ideas such as environmentalism, liberalisation of the economy, democracy, international tourism (Berendse and Roessingh, 2007; Roessingh *et al.*, 2008; Sutherland, 1998). Problems caused by unemployment, the political, and economical marginal role the country has in the region, the everlasting conflict over land with Guatemala and the fact that Belize is a young, independent country makes it necessary for the two dominating government parties United Democratic Party (UDP) and People’s United Party (PUP)[2] to deal with these challenges. In doing so, both government parties have tried to establish and strengthen the promotion of contributions to national development (Medina, 1997, p. 152).

In their policies, investors are considered to be the most significant contributors to national economic development. Therefore, the government has worked to establish an “attractive climate for investment” for international investors (Medina, 1997). Not surprisingly, due to these policies, the Belizean development rhetoric has largely been shaped by the intervention of external donors. International lending institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund coercively enforced their definitions of development on the Government of Belize (GOB). Instead of concentrating on producing products for domestic markets, Belize was reinforced to primarily focus on investments in export production ((The World Bank, 1984).

However, development discourse in Belize cannot only be characterized by coercion applied by the more powerful players. There also exists an actual belief in international models and definitions of development (Medina, 2004, p. 47). The two ruling parties truly believe that through intervention, their nation's trade deficit will decrease and that foreign currency will be earned in order to repay the creditors financing this development strategy. Having adopted this export-led development strategy, the GOB has encouraged (foreign) investment by offering tax and tariff concessions. Belizean citizens were also recommended to seek benefits from the economic development process by investing in the export of agricultural products (Moberg, 1992). Although the Belizean economy is considered successful in the region, current unemployment is estimated at 20 percent, wages lag behind the cost of living and an estimated 33 percent of the population lives in poverty (CIA World Factbook, 2005). Nevertheless, the GOB still draws on emerging transnational discourses that prescribe economic development as the way to eliminate poverty (Shoman, 1994). Against this background Belize recently established diplomatic ties with a relatively new player in the development field, Taiwan.

As stated before, Taiwan argues that, due to comparable backgrounds, their South-South development projects are better applicable than North-South development projects. However, although there might be some similarities in the historical backgrounds of these countries, the differences predominate. Hence, Taiwan's colonizers actually contributed to Taiwan's current success. For instance, Taiwan inherited from the Japanese colonial period (1895-1945) the basic institutional structures. In addition, Taiwan's nationalist government received significant international assistance which contributed to the funding of Taiwan's transformation in terms of social infrastructure. Moreover, Taiwan also had strong neighbourhood effects, such as pressure from China to develop and technology transfers from other East Asian countries that initiated their growth process. These are only a few examples of the differences between Taiwan and Belize[3]. When taking all the historical, geographical, political, and cultural differences between Taiwan and Belize into account, serious questions can be raised about whether the "Taiwan experience" can be transferred to a country like Belize. For a better understanding of Taiwan as a foreign development donor in the Belizean context, it is necessary to first shed light on this emerging Taiwanese development organization.

Taiwan's development organization

Surprisingly, little is known about Taiwan's ICDF and its role as a donor is often overlooked. This ignorance can largely be explained by the diplomatic isolation of Taiwan (Baker and Edmonds, 2004). After exclusion from the UN in 1971, many countries turned their back on Taiwan, which then experienced a drastic decline in receiving international recognition. As a result, little interest has been shown in ICDF's whereabouts. When it comes to its economic success and political reforms, however, Taiwan did receive much international attention (Yang, 1997, p. 6). Not only has the island occasionally been ranked number one in the world when it comes to its production capacity, it also experienced a peaceful and rapid transition to democracy (Huang, 1993, p. 43). This disparity which is based on Taiwan's political and historical events, specifically its relationship with mainland China, has made that Taiwan is currently diplomatically poor but financially rich.

Taiwan's agricultural sector was the cornerstone in contributing to the fundamentals of this richness (Hsiao and Hsiao, 2002). Gradually, the Taiwanese economy went from exporting agricultural processed goods, to the production of low technology

manufactured goods, and is now producing high technology manufactured goods. It was this sector that directed the islands transformation from virtual poverty to a modern rich industrial nation (Baker and Edmonds, 2004, p. 189). With this success, Taiwan presents itself as an example of going from a traditional agricultural society (Huang, 1993) to a country with one of the world's largest foreign exchange reserves. As many developing countries also heavily rely on the agricultural sector, they are hoping on a similar success story. Taiwan therefore uses this comparable situation to justify the agricultural dominance in their development projects. Techniques and knowledge that were once important in Taiwan's development are now being transferred to development countries in the form of technical assistance projects.

Taiwan's development assistance started as early as 1961, under "Operation Vanguard". Their first agricultural technical missions took place in newly independent African countries to help improve fruit and vegetable production (Chan, 1997, p. 4). These missions were expanded to later become the "ROC-Africa Technical Cooperation Committee". Africa remained the main recipient of Taiwan's technical assistance, among some other newly independent countries, until 1971. After that, when Taiwan lost its UN seat, the focus was strategically changed from Africa to South America.

In 1989, under the supervision of the Ministry of Economic Affairs, the Overseas (later renamed "International") Economic Cooperation Development Fund (IECDF) was established.

From that time on the IECDF was responsible of providing economic and social assistance to what they considered "friendly and allied" developing nations (ICDF, 2003, p. 4). A country was considered friendly or allied when it would establish diplomatic relations with Taiwan. Even a country that does not have diplomatic relations with Taiwan can also be considered friendly (Chan, 1997, p. 45). Obviously, the grounds on which a country is considered friendly or allied are subjective and change over time, depending on the estimated potential of a country.

As the variety and number of development projects expanded the government consolidated the IECDF, together with the Committee of International Technical Cooperation, into an independent organization in 1996: the ICDF (Taiwan). Currently, the ICDF is responsible for all development assistance from Taiwan. Its tasks are to maintain but also to expand Taiwan's diplomatic position, in order to prevent the island from becoming further isolated. Quite unique is that the ICDF is coordinated among several government agencies[4]. Many of these representatives declare that Taiwan offers development assistance because it has become relatively wealthy and should share this experience.

This way of internationalizing of Taiwan's economy has the positive "side effect" of enhancing its trade and investment opportunities. More importantly, this aid-giving policy helps to polish Taiwan's international weakened image (Chan, 1997, p. 39). The prevalence of ICDF's political and economic motives also appear from the fact that Taiwan mainly offers development assistance to "friendly" countries from which it receives diplomatic recognition and support for readmission to the UN. This distinguishes Taiwan from most other southern donors who at least pretend that their development projects are an act of solidarity. In fact, diplomatic support became an explicitly defined requisite for countries to receive development assistance from Taiwan. Hence, Taiwan's political and economic motives carry more weight than the solidarity with their southern counterparts. Ultimately, Taiwan wants to use their development programs in order to

increase their chance to be regarded as a full-fledged nation rather than a province of mainland China.

Once a recipient country accepts their conditions, it can receive assistance in three separated categories of development projects:

- (1) technical cooperation;
- (2) grants and relief; and
- (3) loans.

The more recent initiatives (from 1998 on) also include projects for small and medium enterprises, micro credit and volunteer programs. However, the transfer of agricultural technology still constitutes the core of Taiwan's technical programs (ICDF, 2003). As Taiwan's selection of countries was limited, they turned to developing countries in Africa, the Pacific and Central America. Mainly as a consequence of their development projects, nowadays 32 countries formally recognize Taiwan. Most of these countries, however, are small and poor and therefore minor players in international politics (Chan, 1997). In the next section, we will discuss the way in which the South-South cooperation between Taiwan and Belize came about.

ICDF – Taiwan in Belize

It was not until the beginning of 1989 that diplomatic relations were established between Belize, under the former PUP administration and Taiwan (Popma, 2006). The realization of political ties between Belize and Taiwan was a reflection of both their foreign policies. Belize wanted to attract foreign capital by opening up its economy in order to advance the growth potential of its agricultural- and export-based economy (Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), 1995, p. xxix). To fully exploit this source of development, the government wanted to explore new market opportunities by establishing linkages with experienced technicians. Simultaneously, Taiwan's efforts of receiving international recognition consisted of transferring their own core technology to other countries by sending them experienced technicians (Pickles and Woods, 1989). Belize was thereby selected as an appropriate location of sending these technical specialists (ICDF, 2003). As their relations evolved, the President of Taiwan Mr Chen Shui-bian even reassured Belize that:

It is my firm belief that the relations between our two countries will continue to strengthen and grow to our mutual benefit. I look forward to our continued friendship and cooperation (Belize-Taiwan Bulletin, 2003).

Although rhetoric like this is quite common among diplomats, the Taiwanese president actually backed up his words with continued high-level state visits, numerous donations, aid, and loans (Belize-Taiwan Bulletin, 2003). This "friendship" was made even more concrete by academic exchange programs for Belizean students, cultural exchanges, and training courses for Belizean government officials, which were mostly held in Taiwan. Even the Prime Minister of Belize, Mr Musa, has been invited to make field trips to Taiwan in order to facilitate the transfer of the "Taiwan experience" (Chan, 1997). This high degree of attention reflects Taiwan's concern to win, but also maintain, diplomatic recognition from a developing country like Belize.

In starting its technical mission in Belize ICDF worked closely with the Ministry of Agriculture in order to assist in implementing projects. According to the ICDF the main

focus of the projects in Belize must be on import substitution. By enhancing the competitive advantage of products in domestic and regional markets “we [ICDF] aim at contributing to agricultural diversification and introducing new possibilities of value adding, by using local Belizean materials”. The whole team of the Taiwanese mission in Belize currently comprises six members, including a chief, two agronomists, a horticulturist, a food processing specialist, and a mechanic.

When asking about the limited number of Taiwanese experts, ICDF explained that it has proven difficult to send enough manpower that possessed sufficient technical qualifications. They indicated that this is due to the Taiwanese government budget limitations and the difficulty of recruiting qualified personnel to work overseas. Nevertheless, they were proud to say that these six people are now carrying out three different projects in Belize. Centred on the following areas:

- (1) *Rice seed development and technology transfer project*. Within this project rice seed production technology is transferred. Production systems are established and guidance is provided to what ICDF calls “outstanding” farmers and local technicians.
- (2) *Vegetable and crop production improvement and extension project*. The aim of this project is to provide farmers with production techniques for planting market-oriented crops so that vegetable imports can be decreased. The intended aim is to lessen foreign exchange outflows and facilitate the development of multidirectional trade.
- (3) *Food processing project*. This project aims to diversify the Belizean agricultural industry by developing value added products through food processing. The objective is to produce goods with market potential, processed from Belize’s existing agricultural raw materials. For instance, products like dried papaya and dried mango were introduced. The ICDF is promoting diversification in order to gradually reduce Belize’s dependence on imports.

Besides, these main areas, the technical mission also implemented investment and lending projects. For instance, the “Small farmholder-financing scheme” was initiated to provide soft loans and funding for farmers to purchase supplies and farming machines. Nevertheless, the focus of the Taiwanese projects is aimed at “teaching the Taiwan experience” (ICDF, 2003). This emphasis on teaching rather than giving is also stated in an old Taiwanese proverb “give a man a fish and he eats for a day. Teach a man how to fish and he eats for a lifetime”. To see how this philosophy works out in practice the next section takes a closer look at the fate of the Taiwanese development project in Belize by looking at the perceived impact of the project within the Belizean community. First, we will turn to the methodology of the study.

Local responses towards ICDF in Belize

On the road to Central Farm, several large signs welcome visitors in Taiwanese. Suddenly, in the middle of nowhere one can see neat rows of different, sometimes unfamiliar, vegetable and fruit crops. When looking closer, it looks like patches of rural Taiwan have been transplanted into the Belizean landscape. On these patches of land, there are hard working Taiwanese farmers with their faces hidden under Taiwanese straw hats. Once arriving at the farm, a large Taiwanese flag awaits visitors at the entrance. These signs not only proclaim the transnational character of the farm; it also

testifies of the Taiwanese dominance. This is Central Farm, an agricultural research centre, the central base of the Taiwanese development project and its workers who settled here after the diplomatic links between Belize and Taiwan were established. As stated before, the impact of the transplanting of Taiwanese techniques depends on their relationship with their Belizean counterparts. Therefore, in this section, the perceptions of different actors toward the ICDF project in Belize will be described.

Case 1: Belmopan, government responses

When the Taiwanese development workers attempt to promote agricultural development they do so within a particular institutional context. The context that is referred to here is the GOB and its rules governing the introduction and diffusion of the new technologies. In this case study, the focus will be on the perceptions of the Belizean authorities concerning the Taiwanese practices. Belmopan is the capital of Belize. Even though this town is called “Garden City” this is the place where all government officials are located. Although the GOB functions through its several ministries, the Ministry of Agriculture has the principal responsibility for agricultural development and thus for the ICDF projects. However, several other ministries, such as the Ministry of National Development and Foreign Affairs, are also involved.

Agriculture, in Belize, has provided as much as 20-30 percent of GDP and approximately 23 percent of national employment (Central Intelligence Agency 2004 est.) More than three-quarters of its export earnings come from farm products. There are, however, also some serious constraints. Domestic foods supplies depend to a large extent on imports; food accounts for more than one-quarter of Belize’s import bill.

Major agricultural development goals of the GOB are therefore an expansion of exports, greater domestic food production, import substitution and “a higher standard of living for all people in the agricultural sector” (Ministry of Agriculture, 1988). The Belizean government consistently supported agriculture as being the economic mainstay of the country. The lack of a well trained manpower in forestry, agribusiness and agricultural sciences limits the government’s ability, as well as the private sector, to fully support agricultural development activities. Therefore, the GOB warmly welcomes initiatives as those brought by the Taiwanese of supporting agricultural innovations.

Against this background is not surprising that the Taiwanese agricultural mission was deemed a success. Without any exception, the six government officials^[5] participating in this research, were all positive about the Taiwanese development project. Apparently, an important factor in bringing about these positive perceptions of the ICDF project was the Taiwanese willingness to closely cooperate with the GOB. All Taiwanese projects were officially linked with the Ministry of Agriculture. In fact, the Taiwanese approached all the relevant ministries on the project area in “getting things done”. Yet, when questioning officials further about the exact contents and status of ICDF’s projects there was frequently referred to the ICDF itself. It became apparent that the GOB was mainly taking on an accommodating role towards the Taiwanese, instead of being critically informed towards their projects. Indeed, some officials acknowledged that one of the dilemmas facing the ministry administrators was the adequate serving of this outside donor project. Clearly, the GOB had trouble combining that task with carrying out a full-fledged program with an already limited staff. Giving the current mode of operations of the Ministry of Agriculture being “understaffed, under

trained and underfinanced” they stated not being able to meet the requirements for ICDF’s call for Belizean counterparts.

This limited ability of the GOB to control and cooperate with the Taiwanese, brought about a high degree of autonomy for the ICDF project decisions. Consequently, the Taiwanese could implement their policies with ease, without any government constrains or conditions. In many cases, the Taiwanese formed stronger project linkages with institutions in their home country than with local government institutions. Many reports and results were therefore not translated into English for the GOB. Some of the officials complained about the unwillingness of their southern donor to provide information or reports about their activities. Nevertheless, due to this “shortcoming” the government officials said to be most willing to facilitate the Taiwanese in their work. One of the ways in which the GOB had chosen to support the Taiwanese was through promoting Taiwanese food samples at agricultural fairs. The Taiwanese also did their part in maintaining their prominent, comfortable position by keeping up their “friendship” with the Belizean authorities. The various ministries have been continually receiving grants, vehicles, computers, and so on.

The officials considered this “dollar diplomacy”, as the Minister of Agriculture[6] called the Taiwanese project, very beneficial to the country. This generally positive perceptions seemed to be related to the positive public attention towards the development program due to all the grants and gifts. For instance, one minister mentioned that the Taiwanese supported the modernization of Belize’s Foreign Affairs ministry by donating the government BZ\$45,57,788.00. After receiving all this help and assistance from the Taiwanese, the Belizean government wanted to do something substantive in return. Instead of being able to provide adequate Belizean counterparts for the ICDF project, the GOB put their focus on facilitating the need of the Taiwanese. As one official expressed, “participating in the process of national development as the Taiwanese do, should be facilitated by the state’s provision of resources”. Accordingly, the Belizean government provided land, houses, and resources for the Taiwanese development workers. More significantly, they relaxed travel restrictions for all Taiwanese people; they revised immigration laws relating to visas, residence permits, and even passports. Some officials stated that these measures were also aimed at attracting and facilitating more Taiwanese investment into Belize.

In addition to this, the UDP instituted the “Economic Citizenship Program”. This program was designed to attract foreign investment to the country. This program meant that if a family or institution would invest more than BZ\$50,000 in Belize, they would in turn receive passports and enjoy full citizenship status (Medina, 1997, p. 152). This program was unanimously supported by both political parties. Even though this program provoked quite some resistance it was (re)opened from 1989 to 1994. So, upon the establishment of diplomatic ties and the IDCF development project in 1989, there has been a rapid increase of Taiwanese immigrants in Belize. Within a relatively short time Belize became a node in worldwide Taiwanese diasporas (Sutherland, 1998). The negative side to all this friendliness was that the officials felt that there emerged certain distrust on the part of the Belizean citizens. For the Belizean government was often accused of “corrupt” practices and for “filling their own pockets”. Not suprisingly, of the estimated US\$23 million raised during that five year period, it appears that none found its way to the public treasury. Consequently, the purchase of citizenship in general and by the Taiwanese in specific became a nationwide controversial issue. The political

parties of Belize have been blamed for “selling” citizenship to Taiwanese in order to fill their own pockets. An article in *Belize First Magazine* (1995) illustrates this controversy:

LATEST SCANDAL: TAIWANESE INVADE BELIZE

[...] Following the resignation of Minister of Human Resources and the firing of two senior officers in the department in June, figures have been flying on the number of new residency permits issued to Taiwanese and others, both under the current UDP and former PUP regimes. Almost 17,000 individuals, a majority of them from Taiwan, have been granted permanent residency in Belize since 1989. In many cases, the recipients of these residency cards reportedly have never visited Belize. To help clean up the mess, the government has transferred the Immigration and Nationality Department to the Foreign Affairs Ministry.

The Taiwanese migrant population’s easy access to land, resources and job opportunities has made them a constant and growing target for the local population’s hostility and rejection. Many Belizeans, including even some government officials, often refer to the Taiwanese as “Aliens” or “invaders”. The Taiwanese are often pictured as people who buy land and passports but keep away from the locals. As Palacio (1990) argues in his critical review of Belize, that there is a not visible anti-immigrant sentiment being cultivated in Belize. Ethnic relations nor the continuous patterns of immigration and emigration do not only shape these tensions. More importantly, these problems are caused by the nature of the economy of the country, which is open, dependent and under control by foreigners.

Some of the respondents said they are now being accused of equating the concerns of investors, in this case the Taiwanese, with the interest of the nation as a whole. Owing to all this criticism it appeared that the eager embrace of the Taiwanese by the GOB stood in sharp contrast to more mainstream views of Belizean citizens. The government now fears the risk that ICDF’s tasks will be undermined, which is in fact local development. Although most officials hailed the ICDF project as being a major success, they also have the feeling they should be more reserved towards the Taiwanese. In reaction to the negative publicity, these days the Taiwanese are treated the same way or even more strict, as any other foreigner coming to Belize. In fact, despite Taiwan’s Government’s \$100 million loan to Belize, and its subsequent \$4 million grant to Belize, Taiwanese applicants are no longer given a break. Currently, the Economic Citizenship Program no longer exists and the Taiwanese now have to pay a \$3,000 fee for residence applications. While fees are refundable for other nationals, they are not for the Taiwanese. By implementing these measures the government is hoping to recover the trust of its citizens regarding the Taiwanese. The next section demonstrates just how deeply domestic politics influences the perceptions of its citizens.

Case 2: Cayo district, farmer and non-farmer responses

The agricultural project of the Taiwanese involves the transfer of agricultural techniques and information to farmers. Obviously, the adoption of new techniques by Belizean farmers will not go automatically. Acceptance of new technology depends on the way it is perceived by farmers but also by the wider society (Marsden and Oakley, 1990, p. 18). In this section, we will look how these ideas and technologies took root in the Cayo district of Belize where the ICDF at Central Farm is located.

Cayo is a multicultural, predominantly agricultural district, located in the western part of Belize. The various ethnic groups, such as the Mayan Indians, the Garifuna, Creoles, Mestizo, and Mennonites, all left their traces in the agricultural farming systems applied in this area

(IICA, 1995). For instance, many Mayan, Mestizo, and Creole households practice “milpa” farming, which consists of the basic slash and burn preparation and planting, primarily for subsistence family food consumption. A transitional cropping pattern called “mixed farming” is also found in this district, mostly among the Maya and Mestizo farmers.

More diversified crops, some mechanization and other uses of capital inputs characterize these farms. Next to citrus growers, estate agriculture [7] and livestock farms, are significant types of farming in this district which is practiced by the “integrated communities”. These are comprised of the Mennonite farmers who practice integrated, diversified, and mechanized agriculture (Roessingh, 2001). They have a strong impact on the production of items like grains, chicken, eggs, and dairy products all over Belize.

While there seems to be much potential in additional jobs in agriculture in the Cayo district, many people here are no longer attracted to farming. In fact, there are many complaints about local labour shortages in the rural sector at harvest time. In addition, even though the Belize School of Agriculture is located in this district to educate agriculturalists, the number of experts is limited.

The respondents chosen to participate in the discussions are therefore both, farmers as well as non-farmers. As starting point for each discussion both the farmers and non-farmers were asked about the impact of the presence of ICDF on their lives. Both the positive and the negative consequences have been discussed and further elaborated.

The responses of farmers and non-farmers towards the ICDF project were quite diverse. Unexpectedly, the non-farmers perceived the agricultural development project as more positive than the farmers did. The non-farmers were sharing the opinion that Belize benefits from the development project in that the country receives “a lot of aid”. In order to try and confirm the non-farmers positive claims, concrete personal examples were asked for. It soon became clear when asking specifically for examples of (personal) benefits, the respondents found it hard to give any. Some respondents referred to the renovation of the Garifuna Museum that was funded by the ICDF. Others mentioned the introduction of new vegetables such as cauliflower. Evidently, there existed a clear lack of information among the non-farmers about the ICDF’s whereabouts. In fact, most non-farmers were not really aware of what the Taiwanese at Central Farm were exactly doing. Despite this lack of information on the projects, there was a general support for the ICDF presence among the non-farmer respondents.

There were, however, also some negative points addressed by the non-farmers. They resented the fact that the Taiwanese isolated their development personnel away from Belizean social life. Indeed, all of the development workers resided at Central Farm, which lies quite isolated from the wider society and removed from social life in the Cayo district. One of the respondents commented; “they hardly mingle with local people[. . .] They even put their children away into private schools”. After confronting, Mr Chen, the chief of the project with these resentments, he admitted to put his children to a private school. He stated that his choice for a private school had to do with the quality of the education.

The farmers, on the contrary, were in general more sceptical towards the agricultural development projects. All of the farmers had been farming long before the Taiwanese Agricultural Mission arrived. The Taiwanese introduced specific methods of land management, where farmers have to operate their land as a business rather than a supplement to domestic food supply (ICDF, 2005). Consequently, some farmers were never interested in the new techniques brought by the Taiwanese to begin with. They only produced for home consumption and did not have any intentions to change that in the future.

In addition, there were also farmers who regarded the Taiwanese who came to demonstrate new techniques as “Chinaman farmers”[8] rather than as foreign technical workers. They perceived the Taiwanese technical workers more as competitors than as foreign experts. Obviously, this was due to a lack of information about the practices of the ICDF projects.

Diversification and soil management, examples of techniques that significantly contributed to Taiwan’s agricultural development, were important elements in ICDF’s projects. These techniques were also introduced in Cayo, where farmers had been advised to diversify their activities. This was considered an important element in the development project and was generally perceived positively among farmers. Many improved varieties of already familiar crops such as tomato and papaya were very popular among the participating farmers. They found that the quality and attractiveness of the fruits and vegetables had improved. It became clear that these positive claims were influenced by growing market demand and thus profitability on behalf of the farmers.

The Taiwanese development workers also introduced crops that were unfamiliar to the farmers. The farmers’ responses to these new crops were less positive. Farmers in Cayo saw no reason in producing “alien” or Taiwanese products. Again, their preference was clearly influenced by the demand of the Belizean people. Many Belizeans did not buy products unfamiliar to them. One farmer stated that these Taiwanese products, like Chinese cabbage, were mainly meant for the “Taiwanese people”. On the other hand, some Taiwanese products were embraced by Belizean consumers such as the newly introduced guava, and thus also by the farmers. There was thus a clear link noticeable between positive perceptions on behalf of the farmers and profit.

Farmers who participated in the development program noticed that their production had increased, making their farming practices more profitable. The main explanation for this was that the technical mission introduced new farming techniques which enabled higher yields. For instance, the farmers were able to produce more vegetables “off-season”. Some farmers cited the introduction of new seeds as the main reason in that they could produce more diverse crops in a shorter time.

However, there was also a down side to this, besides introducing new techniques the Taiwanese were also notorious for introducing “many, many rules”. Hence, the use of new techniques and seed development required intensive training. Farmers who participated in the project were to keep themselves to “strict rules on attendance, hard work, participation and leadership” (ICDF, 2005). These rules were introduced to coordinate the farmers’ efforts and increase production, productivity, and market potential.

Not all participating farmers followed these rules as closely as the Taiwanese would have liked. While some farmers acknowledged the purpose of the rules, others took it as an insult. One farmer commented that “they think we are stupid and lazy and that is why they want to tell us all their rules”. One discussion evidenced a tendency of paternalism; some accused the Taiwanese to consider themselves as “superior” in relation to the farmers. Moreover, the farmers stated that the project workers acted as if the Belizean development problem is a matter of “lack of knowledge” on behalf of the farmers. The project workers are said to consider themselves as agents of knowledge and believe that it is the task of the project to convince the farmers to “improve” agricultural practices. The farmers partly acknowledge that there is a “shortage” of knowledge indeed, however, they also blame this on their “lack of resources”. Thus, although most farmers

agreed that the techniques introduced by the Taiwanese were useful, these perceived problems were mainly a result of the (lack of) communication between the Taiwanese and the farmers, this is considered below in some detail.

Communication

As the technical missions mainly consisted of the transfer of skills and knowledge, communication between the (non-) farmers and the Taiwanese was inevitable. In addition, open communication increases the opportunity for effective transfer of skills and practices, which improves learning (Bräutigam, 1998, p. 169). In order to accomplish an actual transfer of knowledge, the Taiwanese had to make themselves and their projects known under the Belizean population. Second, they had to communicate with the Belizean farmers who decided to participate in their projects. When it came to the marketing (or selling) of the ICDF technical mission, it became clear that the Taiwanese had not yet succeeded. Both, farmers and non-farmers, had trouble describing what the Taiwanese projects consisted of. In fact, many Belizeans acknowledged even having some difficulty figuring out what it exactly is the Taiwanese are doing. For instance, a number of respondents perceived the Central Farm as being a governmental training or teaching centre. Others, on the contrary, considered it as place that sells fresh fruits and vegetables. While most agreed that Central Farm was the place where the ICDF was located, much vagueness existed on their exact whereabouts. This suggests a lack of communication on the side of ICDF about the contents, aims and possibilities of their programs.

As for the participating farmers, the communication aspect appeared to be even more troubling. Even though not all respondents acknowledged having communication problems with their Taiwanese counterparts most of them did, one way or the other. Most farmers cited that they find it almost impossible to communicate with the Taiwanese for “them people hardly speak any English or Spanish”.

Indeed, the Taiwanese workers confirmed having trouble to communicate with local people. The project teams therefore saw few opportunities to actually transfer the knowledge they had. That is why they started to give demonstrations. A few farmers were a bit sceptical about this approach as one commented; “It is impossible to teach somebody, if you cannot talk to the person”. A few farmers did not consider this a problem. They, on the contrary, stated to be impressed by the fact that the Taiwanese were willing to “get their hands dirty”. According to these farmers, they learned more by watching than by listening.

Consequences

As a consequence, of this limited dialogue the farmers often stated they perceived the Taiwanese development workers as secretive: “with them you never know if they mean what they say because they always smile at you”. These perceptions of secretiveness extended to the farmers becoming suspicious towards the Taiwanese good intentions. This questioning of the true developmental intentions of the Taiwanese was reinforced by the fact that they worked closely with the Belizean government. One farmer commented “anyone who works with our government is not to be trusted”. Consequently, farmers doubted the Taiwanese accountability. For some farmers it was already clear that the Taiwanese were only in Belize “for their own good”. Their easy access to land and resources were enough prove for them. Others mentioned the fact that the Taiwanese isolated their personnel from Belizean social life as evidence of their

self-interest. One farmer even accused the Taiwanese of wanting to “take over Belize”. He referred to a Taiwanese- Belizean, named Ralph Huang, who was running for candidate in the Cayo north-east convention at that time.

These negative images of the Taiwanese suggest that the ICDF workers were not really concerned with, or at least not working on their image. However, the perceptions of secrecy were probably more the result of the communication problems and lack of information sharing. The Taiwanese development workers never realized that their behaviour had such an effect on the Belizeans. Even though many farmers were convinced that the Taiwanese were secretive, some farmers gave them the benefit of the doubt. They interpreted the reserved behaviour of the Taiwanese as “being polite” and “part of their culture”. Thus, in general the farmers were positive about newly introduced techniques, however, they strongly resented the poor communication skills of the Taiwanese. Owing to this they started to doubt the Taiwanese development projects’ accountability. In the light of the difficulties the farmers were having in communication, more problems arose. One of the main problems will be considered below.

Loans

A lot of the machinery that the Taiwanese introduced in terms of their agricultural project was unaffordable for the average Belizean farmer. In addition, farmers who participated in the ICDF projects were faced with having to procure their own seed, fertilizer and more. Financial resources, so critical to invest and buy the proper machinery, were available to only some of the farmers. Many investments in agriculture had to be financed by the farmer himself.

Although there are some Belizean banks in the rural financial market, they are sceptical towards providing loans to rural people. Many lenders resist lending to farmers because agricultural prices, incomes, and thus repayment capacities are not secured. In the light of this problem ICDF provided loans to farmers in order to improve their business activities, increase employment, and reduce poverty (ICDF, 2005). This aspect of the project, however, has become a major concern for both the farmers and the technical mission.

Owing to the lack of information provided on behalf of the Taiwanese, many farmers found themselves not able or willing to pay back the loans. One farmer mentioned that this confusion was due to obscurity of the loan agreement. Even though the loan agreement was brief, about two pages, it was considered too formal with a lot of jargon. The agreement stated the amount of the loan, the time of period over which the loan could be used and, not unimportant, the repayment procedures.

Indeed, the document could have been written in a less formal way, however, it also appeared that the documents were not well read by Belizean farmers. This was probably the main cause of all the misunderstandings. Perhaps, not surprising, many farmers reported that they considered the ICDF as an extension of the government. As one farmer stated:

[...] when we borrow from the government, who is not to be trusted anyway, we will not consider paying back our debts as urgent. They steal from us we steal from them.

The fact that the ICDF has worked so closely with the GOB has proven to be a serious threat to their overall accountability. In a country like Belize where the government is notorious for patronage practices and “filling their own pockets” there already exists a

certain distrust. In working closely with the GOB, the ICDF might have been sending the wrong intentions to the Belizean people. Moreover, since they also kept themselves away from the average Belizean, it is not really surprising that a certain degree of distrust emerged.

As this is an ongoing project the solution to this problem has not yet been presented. What is known, however, is that the Taiwanese realized that the communication aspect of their mission needed improvement. So, in trying to get the farmers to start paying back their loans, the Taiwanese went to pay them personal visits. During these visits they tried to convince the farmers that ICDF is not a government institution but an independent development agency. They tell the farmers that since they are a development agency the interest rates of the loans are relatively low. In order to be able to take advantage of these low interest rates, farmers are persuaded to pay back their debts soon in order to avoid the rates to rise.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the Taiwanese development project of ICDF in Belize. In doing so, this study has examined a significant but overlooked chapter in the development literature. An effort was made to verify whether this South-South project had characteristics that made it appropriate to developing country conditions. This was done by offering more insights into the Taiwanese development organization in general and the development projects in Belize in specific. To give an answer to the central question of what the social impact of the ICDF project in Belize was, we now turn to a critical appraisal of this South-South development effort.

After visiting Taiwan's project sites in Belize and interviewing government officials, Taiwanese-Belizeans, Belizean farmers, and non-farmers, it was found that much of what the Taiwanese brought was indeed considered beneficial, although incomplete. The links between the technical mission and wider society were not well developed, yet not least because of the difficulties in communicating with the Taiwanese development workers (because of their lack of English proficiency). It would be wrong to suggest, however, that Taiwan's development project was only perceived as raising problems for it did have a positive impact.

Taiwan brought to Belize a set of technologies and practices primarily intended to promote diversification and increase production to substitute imported goods. In doing so the Taiwanese brought about a significant variation in the agricultural products available on Belizean markets. They introduced to the Belizean people new seeds, fruits, and vegetables. These innovations introduced by the Taiwanese were clearly an attempt to apply their own rural "Taiwan experiences" to Belize. Moreover, the Belizeans perceived the new technology that their southern counterpart introduced, positively. Many respondents reacted enthusiastically when they were asked about the Taiwanese development projects. In this sense, it can be concluded that the Taiwanese introduced technologies that were suitable for the Belizean environment.

Yet when digging deeper it appeared that many Belizeans shared the opinion that the impact of the Taiwanese project largely remained foreign or "alien" in that it remained distant from Belizean society. The Taiwanese showed little awareness in the significance of adapting to local conditions. It appeared that the Taiwanese failed to include essential aspects that have been identified as crucial to the local acceptance of development programs. Hence, they had the tendency to ignore the influence of domestic

considerations such as language barriers or cultural differences. In doing so, they overlooked the context in which the projects had to be implemented.

In particular, they ignored the larger social picture that affected the projects' implementation and acceptance. This hindered the actual transfer of their technology, as it seemed very difficult to bring into practice.

As a consequence, much of the technology never actually reached Belizean farmers. Although it is often claimed that development assistance from the south is more suitable to the south, this specific project did not fully show evidence in favour of this advantage. Clearly, contextual, human factors influence the implementation and course of a project; this was certainly the case for Taiwan's project in Belize. Why then, did the Taiwanese handicap their projects impact by acting on the basis of insufficient knowledge of local practices?

The answer to this question can be traced to at least two factors: the first important factor restricting the positive impact of the ICDF was their one-sided focus. The Taiwanese regarded their work as purely technical; they mainly focussed on their agricultural technical tasks and products. This gave the impression that they were disinterested, neutral carriers of technical knowledge, who disregarded the ideas and assumptions of the wider society.

Furthermore, within this specific southern development project there was little awareness of the significance of providing appropriate technologies, nor of the possibility of adapting project techniques to enhance local employment and training. Moreover, the fact that some Taiwanese development workers could hardly speak English or Spanish and dissociated themselves from Belizean life, shaped the contents as well as the reach of the project.

This again enforces the premise that alienation from wider society has a negative side effect. In fact, many of the negative perceptions of respondents came down to this narrow technical focus. Against this background it can be stated that the technical aspect of development workers in a foreign country is probably just as important as the social aspect. For an actual transfer of technology to take place, cooperation and communication between the sender and the receiver is required. Hence, accurate information sharing and role clarification about what the Taiwanese had to offer may be an essential task for the ICDF in the future. A part of a possible solution would also be to incorporate a better awareness of the local Belizean culture into the design and implementation of the Taiwanese development intervention. One way to do this is by involving local (farmers-) knowledge in the decision-making process rather than imposing on them a certain view. For, as the preceding cases illustrated, Belizeans have their own opinions about development in their country.

The second restriction to the positive impact of the ICDF had to do with the political objectives of the Taiwanese assistance. In Taiwan the commitment of the government to agricultural development has been a notable feature of its economic success.

The Taiwanese were hoping on a similar devotion of the Belizean government. Although the commitment of the Belizean government was there on paper, they actually lacked the ability to assign adequate counterparts. Evidently, the Taiwanese introduced institutional demanding agricultural innovations into an environment with relatively weak institutions. It became clear that Belizean government officials had trouble with the process of establishing beneficial linkages to the farmers. Ultimately, Taiwan's imported development ideology required not only acceptance at the highest political levels but also at the local "grassroots" level.

Furthermore, it appeared that the assistance from Taiwan was provided to obtain immediate political objectives; receiving international recognition. This explains why the Taiwanese were mainly interested in cooperation at the government level. These non-developmental motives influenced the development impact adversely.

This point touches the delicate subject of the role of the government in development projects. Indeed, decisions of development organizations to cooperate with government institutions can be positive, but not if the recourses never “trickle down” and add to local capacity building. So, until the GOB provides an “enabling environment”[9] for its citizens, the promise of the “Taiwan experience” is likely to remain untapped. Until then, it is strongly recommended that the future cooperation between the GOB and the ICDF will focus on the full training of appropriate local personnel in order to facilitate sufficient counterparts. These local agents are then also more familiar with the local Belizean practices in terms of culture (life-style) and language.

These paradoxical results of Taiwan’s technical mission invalidate the positive expectations of the appropriateness of South-South development projects. When the Taiwanese came to Belize they said they wanted to “teach the Belizean people how to fish, instead of giving them fish”. Even though they might have taught some Belizeans how to fish, most of them were just receiving some little fish instead. One of the main criticisms of North-South development assistance has been that the beneficiaries have little input in the project planning and implementation process. In most North-South assistance, projects are largely conceived, planned, and implemented by bureaucrats of the donor and recipient governments (Bobiash, 1992). Consequently, it is not surprising that these projects had great difficulty in mobilizing human resources other than those provided by the donor. Unfortunately, this South-South project did not deviate from this pattern. In fact, the Taiwanese did not draw any lessons from earlier experiences from their northern counterparts, instead they displayed similar weaknesses.

Bearing in mind that there exists an immense variety of donors, recipients, types of projects, and environments in which they are implemented, generalizing about development projects should be approached with great caution. Nonetheless, this study did not provide a clear evidence to support the claim that South-South development assistance is more appropriate than those supported by northern donors. Moreover, this case of the Taiwanese effort to transfer their “Taiwan experience” is just another example that political and economic motives are not the right starting point for any organization to offer development assistance. As the Taiwanese development assistance is mainly focussed on their intention to withstand their countries’ isolated background, a clear view on the actual impact is hindered. Moreover, as long as the political and economic input of ICDF is driven by self-interest, it remains unlikely that their projects will have a humanitarian outcome.

Nevertheless, given the fact that development assistance is becoming a scarce resource worldwide, Taiwan’s development organization ICDF in specific, and South-South development assistance in general, can without a doubt contribute in ensuring its continued existence in being a useful, if limited, developmental tool. The challenge now for developing countries and countries in transition interested in promoting South-South development is to build on its strengths, its comparative advantages, and to seek refinements in present approaches where they could bring improvements (Bobiash, 1992). In doing so, they should bear in mind the lessons learned by their northern counterparts and take examples from projects and approaches that

have worked well in different sectors. As well, it should again be stressed that South-South development assistance also has many achievements and potential.

Notes

1. Also referred to as “less developed”, “undeveloped”, “underdeveloped”, “south”, and “backward”.
2. Belize Government is based on the Westminster model.
3. For a more detailed description of Taiwan’s history, see Hsiao and Hsiao (2002).
4. Such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Transportation and Communication, the Council of Agriculture, the Taiwan Institute of Economic Research, The International Commercial Bank, and other related government organs.
5. Minister of Agriculture, Minister of National Development, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Government Official Immigration Department, Chief ICDF, and Second Secretary Embassy of Taiwan.
6. Hon. Michael Espot.
7. Relatively large-scale farms providing bananas, sugar cane, and mangoes with extensions of more than 50 acres.
8. Belizean slang for Chinese farmer.
9. An environment in which development can be undertaken by the people themselves (Marsden and Oakley, 1990, p. 4).

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