Designing Community Based Development

When properly designed, community based programs can be highly effective in managing natural resources, providing basic infrastructure or ensuring primary social services. Participation in community based development (CBD) depends on reversing control and accountability from central authorities to community organizations. Successful design requires tapping into local needs, understanding and building on the strengths of existing institutions, and defining the changes needed in intermediary implementing agencies to support community action.

Costs and Benefits

There are two persistent myths about community based programs: first, that they cost more than conventional programs and, second, that they take longer. Additional costs may be incurred at the outset in building capacity at the local level; however, these costs are significant only when community level organizations have been so eroded that substantial time and resources have to be devoted to capacity building. And even when initial costs are high, they are more than offset by subsequent gains.

Evidence increasingly indicates that, when the institutional framework is right, participatory community based programs actually cost less (see Box 1) and are quicker to implement. In Bank funded projects, the typical pattern has been a slow build up period, when time is invested in community organization and setting the rules for interaction, followed by speedy disbursements.

Once the participatory process is established, the benefits of community based development include increased efficiency and cost effectiveness. Furthermore, when the success of projects depends heavily on changes in behavior at the community level, promoting participation in community based programs may be the only means of meeting objectives. The examples in Box 2 indicate the potential benefits of a community based approach in three broad areas—managing natural resources, providing basic infrastructure and ensuring primary social services.

Conditions for Success

From time immemorial, communities have organized themselves to take care of collective and individual needs. And yet, in the last fifty years, so many attempts at getting people to participate and take responsibility for community based development have failed. Experience provides some clear lessons about what works and what does not work in CBD. Prominent among the failures have been attempts to achieve results on

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<th>Box 1</th>
<th>Does Participatory Community Based Development Cost More?</th>
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<td>In Pakistan’s Orangi Pilot Project, which provided sewerage facilities to nearly one million people in a poor area of Karachi, costs were one-eighth of conventional sewerage provided by city authorities. This was due to changes in technical design and the elimination of pay offs to intermediaries (Khan, 1992).</td>
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<td>In Brazil’s PROSENEAR project, a ceiling of $120 per capita has been imposed on sanitation expenditures. Within this cost limit, engineers and community development experts are encouraged to work with communities to devise the most appropriate solutions. Through this process, projects have been designed for as little as $50 per capita (Vijay Jagannathan, 1994).</td>
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Community Participation Yields Significant Results

In Gujarat, India, during the 1980s, an average of 18,000 forest offenses were recorded annually: 10,000 cases of timber theft, 2,000 grazing, 700 fires, and 5,300 other offenses. Twenty forestry officials were killed in confrontations with communities and offenders, and assaults on forestry officials were frequent. In response, an experiment in joint management with communities was initiated by the conservator. This included community meetings, widely publicized creation of forest protection committees, and profit sharing of 25 percent of timber returns with local groups. As a result, conflicts between officials and community groups diminished, community groups assumed responsibility for patrolling forests, and productivity of land and returns to villages increased sharply. In one year, one village of eighty-eight households harvested and sold twelve tons of firewood, fifty tons of fodder, and other forest products, while also planting and protecting teak and bamboo trees (Pathan, et al, 1993).

In Côte d’Ivoire, a national rural water supply program established community water groups which managed maintenance of 13,500 waterpoints and reduced breakdown rates from 50 percent to 11 percent at one-third the cost. The shift to community level maintenance was managed by taking away the responsibility for rural water supply from the sector agency, supporting private sector involvement in spare parts distribution, retraining technicians, and signing contracts with village groups and the water directorate. The results were sustained in those villages which had high demand for the rehabilitated water point and where well functioning community organizations already existed (Hino, 1993).

In Tamil Nadu, India, a community based nutrition outreach program in 9,000 villages resulted in a one-third decline in severe malnutrition. A group of twenty women interested in health issues was hired in each village as part time community workers accountable to the community. The women’s groups, formed initially to “spread the word,” subsequently branched off and started food production activities on their own. Earlier programs focusing only on the creation of health infrastructure were unable to make any difference in the nutritional status of children (Tamil Nadu Integrated Nutrition Project, 1990).


Box 2
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need to be taken to ensure that these conditions are in place.

What may seem an obvious point but is often neglected is that a group functions only because it is addressing a felt need of its members. A fundamental design flaw in a natural resource management project in the Philippines, for example, was the assumption that upland farmers were interested in forest management. In contrast, the need to solve what is perceived as an urgent problem may bring different class and power groups together. In South India, for example, the entire village manages community based irrigation systems and has developed a monitoring system to discourage water theft. Groups continue to function so long as the benefits of participation to their members continue to outweigh the costs (see Box 3). Hence project design must be based on knowledge of community demand and must ensure that incentives to participation are in place.

In any community, inherited networks of organized reciprocity and solidarity form the basis for individual trust and cooperation. New community based programs need to use and build on this existing stock of social capital and, wherever possible, to work through existing organizations. In Nepal, for example, when government policy prescribed the creation of
farmer associations, assistant overseers found many informal groups of farmers organized around irrigation systems. Rather than creating new organizations, these existing groups were encouraged to register themselves as official farmer associations.

Sometimes, notably when existing social organization is highly inequitable, creating new groups is the only means of promoting the participation of disadvantaged people. Many successful projects that specifically target women or the poor have formed special organizations such as the Grameen Bank, the Self Employed Women’s Association of India, and women’s farmer groups in Nigeria and Gambia. These new organizations are the creation of their members, drawing as much as possible on what is already in place. Attempts to speed up a community development process, by circumventing existing institutions and investing in new externally designed organizations have frequently failed in their aims. They also carry the danger of undermining existing institutions, diminishing the capacity of community members to cooperate and organize effectively for other purposes.

An important reason for building on indigenous principles of organization is that, to be effective, a group must own and enforce its own rules defining membership criteria, the allocation of responsibilities, contributions and benefits, and the mechanisms for ensuring accountability and resolving conflicts. If these rules are dictated from outside, people do not feel obliged to follow them, free riding becomes common, conflicts escalate, and the group becomes ineffective (see Box 3).

Depending on the tasks the group is designed to manage, and the existing capacity of the group, investment in training may be needed over a period of several years to build the necessary management and technical skills. Groups have failed because too much was expected of them too soon without supportive training.

Changes in Implementing Agencies

Designing an appropriate outreach strategy to support the community development process often involves difficult changes in the structure and orientation of the implementing agencies. The technical personnel in engineering agencies are commonly reluctant and ineffective community organizers. Merely adding more community workers makes no difference unless the overall incentive environment rewards staff for responsiveness to clients and support to community workers. Incentives for performance are easier to institute when agencies are required to be financially viable, have autonomy to manage themselves, and have control over hiring and firing of staff.

An alternative to restructuring existing agencies is to contract out the needed services to NGOs (as in rural water supply in Kenya), the private sector (in agriculture in Malaysia), other government agencies (public health workers for a water and sanitation project in Brazil), or multi- or bilateral agencies (UNICEF in low income housing in Guatemala). In Mexico, the National Water authority has an in-house group of senior social scientists and communication specialists who design the strategy for community outreach, applied research and communications. This is then subcontracted to the private sector.

The choice of outreach approach needs to match the goals of the program. The extension approach, in which the field agent acts primarily as a channel of information and inputs, and remains accountable to the agency rather than the community group, is not appropriate when the

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**Box 3
The Benefits Must Outweigh the Costs**

In the Philippines, farmers actually negotiated an increase in their irrigation fees because they had worked out a formula with the irrigation agency through which they would benefit from imposing and managing the collection of higher fees (NIACONSULT, 1993).

If the group does not undertake new tasks as old ones are accomplished, there is no new benefit flow and the costs begin to outweigh benefits. In Indonesia, water user groups that took on new tasks and provided additional benefits (such as individual household toilets and food security) continued to thrive while others that did not functioned at a low level or not at all (Narayan, 1989).

In Pakistan, 14,000 water users associations (WUAs) were hurriedly created to become active in water course improvements. However, when construction was completed, the WUAs did not move on to broader irrigation management tasks because they saw neither a purpose nor a benefit to continued existence. Instead, they reverted back to the traditional warabandi system, which was already well established and hence involved lower transaction costs (Byrnes, 1992).
objective is community initiative and responsibility for management. When the success of a program hinges on participation through strong local groups, an empowerment approach is called for, where the field agent is a community organizer acting in liaison with technical agencies. It may be essential to introduce female agents to ensure the participation of women.

The role of the agency and its relationship with community groups needs to be supported by appropriate changes in legislation. Key issues include the mandate of agencies, funding mechanisms, accountability systems, the registration requirements and legal status of community groups, and use and tenure rights over assets (particularly over natural resources). Many rules and regulations may also need to be changed, from the required qualifications for community workers, teachers or health educators, for example, to procurement rules.

Implementing the institutional and legislative changes necessary to support large scale community based programs inevitably meets resistance from powerful vested interests and needs strong political support to see it through. Many Bank projects that implement institutional reform are led by reform minded senior civil servants with access to the country’s top political leaders.

Box 4

Checklist: Steps in Designing Large Scale Projects

• Clarify and prioritize objectives. Link objectives to outputs.
• Identify the key stakeholders at the community and agency levels. Assess their capacity and interests.
• Assess (do not assume) demand, bearing in mind that demand is influenced by the confidence people have in the service provider.
• Establish eligibility criteria for community groups, so that communities can select themselves into projects, rather than projects selecting communities.
• Structure subsidies that do not distort demand.
• Restructure fund release to support demand.
• Learn by doing, adjusting plans annually on the basis of experience.
• Invest in strengthening social organization to increase local participation in decision making.
• Institute participatory monitoring and evaluation and feedback loops.
• Redefine procurement rules to support community level procurement where appropriate.

Box 5

Shared Control and Benefits: CAMPFIRE in Zimbabwe

The incentive for Zimbabwe to protect its wildlife resources is high. Wildlife activities such as safari hunting, game cropping, tourism, and live animal sales contribute over $250 million annually to Zimbabwe’s national economy. Most wildlife, however, is outside parks on tribal or communally owned land. The Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management has recognized that wildlife resources will only be conserved if private and communal landowners derive economic benefit from protection of the resource and are given responsibility for conservation and management. The return of benefits to local communities from wildlife resources is the basis of Zimbabwe’s Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE).

Using the CAMPFIRE approach and philosophy, the Chikwarakwara community of approximately 150 households in the remote Beirbridge area of Zimbabwe has taken over proprietorial management authority for wildlife resources from the district council. After a series of negotiations focusing on community membership, household definition and revenue sharing procedures, the council devolved management responsibilities and access to revenues derived from safari hunting activities to the community. The benefits accrued to the community as a result of this responsibility have included a new school, a new grinding mill, and a Z$200 cash payment to each household. The Council has benefitted through an 11.7 percent levy, and the central government has benefited through an increase in taxable revenues.

The CAMPFIRE approach has not worked where communities have not been involved in rule formulation or where sharing of benefits with communities is minimal. In Nyaminyami District in the Zambezi Valley, for example, there are inequities in the distribution of benefits and in the management responsibilities between the district council, the ward, and the villages. The basic issue of whether the Nyaminyami Wildlife Trust, which was created by the district council to develop institutional capacity for wildlife management, should be an income-earner at the district level or a grassroots wildlife management program has yet to be resolved. (Scoones and Matose, 1993.)