

## RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN MATARA DISTRICT UNDER A SWEDISH ASSISTED IRDP

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During the second half of the 1970s the southern part of Sri Lanka was characterized by many of the typical signs of under-development. More than half the population was eligible for food stamps, and there were high levels of unemployment, high infant mortality and high morbidity rates.

The normal government activities in the districts could only operate and maintain existing facilities or undertake very limited new investments, which are quite inadequate to improve the living standards of the people of backward districts. Hence the need for special development efforts.

One such response to the problem was the Matara Integrated Rural Develop-

ment Project, launched in 1979, and sponsored by SIDA, the Swedish International Development Authority. Since its inception, however, the project has undergone very considerable change in nature and orientation, so much so that the activities which were undertaken in the early years are now commonly viewed in an unfavourable light.

What, then, have been the principles behind the project and its management; what are the implications of a changing philosophy, in the particular circumstances of Matara District, for the project inputs and achievements; and what does the future course of the project look like? These are a few important questions which we try to answer in this article.

### PROGRAMME POLICY AND GUIDELINES

#### Government of Sri Lanka Policy for Rural Development

The principle of Integrated Rural Development (IRD) was adopted as formal government policy in 1977. IRD is a coherent effort to trigger rural development, through a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of the rural poor - small farmers, tenants and the landless. Such a strategy recognises the need for involving the poor in the planning, implementation and the subsequent maintenance stages of the projects. Thus important concerns emerge. Benefits of development are targeted to the poor group in rural communities and that they participate in the development process actively, has become a major concern.

#### SIDA Aims and Policy for Rural Development

Initially the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA) played a relatively passive role in IRDP formulation. The general aim of development assistance was seen as being the contribution to raising the standard of living

of the poor people by means of a direct attack on poverty and its causes, but this was not translated into specific policy prescriptions. Rather a "self reliant" approach to IRD planning was adopted.

The Swedish Parliament, Riksdag, has laid down five criteria concerning the design and direction of Swedish development assistance. It should lead to

economic growth

- economic and social equalization
- economic and political independence
- the democratic development of society
- far-sighted management of natural resources and conservation of the environment.

Based on these goals SIDA worked out a Strategy for Rural Development in the early 80s. The general rule is that the target group for SIDA assistance to rural development projects is the 40 percent of the rural population with the lowest income. The Strategy distinguishes between two potential approaches to the target group: local people have a decisive role in decision making and implementation of development activities; or local people are consulted in order to guide Government decisions. A clear

preference has been given to the delegation of a decisive role to local people; "resource growth through people's participation". This implies that there are people's organizations (political or other) at the local level.

The goal of "economic growth" has since 1981, been replaced by that of "resource growth" in the Strategy. This implies a wider set of objectives. In addition to economic resources there are others of importance for the development of a country. Knowledge that is gradually built up in a country's state administration is an example of a non-economic resource. The emergence of a national pride can be an important resource in a country with wide differences between groups of people.

The equalization goal has been further disaggregated in the Strategy: a) equality of income and property, b) equality of access to social services such as education, health and drinking water and c) equality of social status and political influence. The second type b) has tended to be the focus of SIDA assistance to rural development projects so far.

### ORGANIZATION

The Regional Development Division (RDD) of the Ministry of Plan Implementation is the central body with overall responsibility for the formulation and implementation of Integrated Rural Development Programmes. The Division operates through a network of Project Offices in the districts where the IRDPs are carried out. RDD translates national strategies and policies into concrete recommendations to be observed by the District IRDP Offices.

At the district level the Matara IRDP is organised by the Project Office under the Project Director and three Assistant Directors. In the early stages of the IRDP much of the project planning and implementation was undertaken by line departments in the District. While line departments continue to be important in implementation, the Project Office now plays a considerably more active role in the planning and direction of projects, monitoring and evaluation. For some components the Project Office is

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the primary implementation agency by way of its Development Officers and Plan Implementation Officers.

At the local level, Assistant Government Agents, (AGAs), have been increasingly drawn into the project planning and implementation process while village organisations such as Rural Development Societies and Thrift and Credit Co-operative Societies are also important in this respect.

As in other IRDPs the overall appraisal and monitoring of the project is carried out by the District Coordinating Committee headed by the District Minister and the Government Agent. The latter is also important in the support of the project through his coordinating and administrative rôles.

Overall Agreements for each phase signed between the Governments of Sri Lanka (through the External Resources Department) and Sweden (through SIDA) form the basis for inputs and activities to be implemented. Plans of Operation have been suggested by the Matara IRDP Office for each phase, broken down to Annual plans.

Since the inception of the IRDP in Matara in 1979, annual reviews of the programme have been conducted jointly by SIDA and the IRDP. Annual reviews scrutinise progress made (or lack of it), appraise new proposals for the following year and also make fund allocations for the following year's activities. Generally annual reviews take stock of the IRDP strategy and approach to ensure that the project is on course to achieving the planned impacts. Annual reviews also double for internal evaluation needs of SIDA.

External evaluations have been undertaken at the end of a phase or at an important juncture of the IRDP. There are two evaluations of the Matara IRDP - one conducted in 1982 and the other in 1987, both towards the end of Phase I and Phase II respectively. Evaluations play an important role in SIDA's decision making with regard to assistance to the IRDP.