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Re-orienting land use planning: towards a community participatory approach

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• Introduction

The value of land use planning at the local level has been limited by a number of characteristics of the standard approach which has been followed. A new approach to land use planning is needed if this concept is to be more sensitive to the needs of rural communities.

• Critique of the standard approach to land use planning (SLUP)

Based on experience in Africa four groups of problems can be identified.

- Lack of local participation: the initiatives for SLUP usually come from government officials or others outside the local community. These outsiders set the goals for SLUP while external technicians undertake the analysis. SLUP uses few of the resources and skills of local communities and relies heavily upon innovations developed on research stations.
- Incomplete conceptualisation of problems: because SLUP has developed from soil survey and land capability assessments, it focuses upon the relationship between land use and the environmental characteristics of an area. This has led to a neglect of the socio-economic and political factors at the household, community and national levels, which influence land use. In SLUP there is also a tendency to focus on land use per se and to neglect the details of land

management and husbandry, i.e. how land use is implemented.

- Limited replicability: SLUP involves considerable manpower and technical resources. These are often supplied by donors in the form of a project. The development of a national capacity to undertake SLUP is restricted by the resource costs with the result that land use planning tends to be a 'one-off' exercise.
- Poor utilisation and implementation of the output from SLUP: The maps and documents, which are typically produced by SLUP, are not easily used by field staff and farmers. They need translating into forms, which can be understood. As a result the implementation of LUP is often difficult and tends to be delayed while appropriate 'translation' is undertaken. This problem is often made worse by the way in which SLUP is often undertaken as an exercise, which is separate from project implementation. This tends to produce land use plans for unspecified others to implement.

Overall it appears that SLUP tends to increase dependence on external interventions, skills and solutions, and fails to develop local capacity to analyse problems and develop locally-relevant innovations.

• Principles of a participatory approach for local level land use planning (PPOP)

A series of principles can be outlined which should guide the reorientation of land use planning for local level use. These would include:

- Local agenda setting and an integrated approach: the local community must, as far as possible, initiate and set the agenda for activities in their communities. Natural resource management (NRM) issues must not be forced to the top of the agenda by outsiders. Other more pressing issues must be addressed first, so an integrated approach is needed in order to raise NRM to the top of the agenda.
- An holistic view with socio-economic perspectives: better land use and natural resource management requires consideration of the full range of influences upon land use. Rather than collecting vast amounts of detailed environmental data, which are often redundant because local communities know where new land uses and innovations may be appropriate, more attention should be given to analysis of the various causes of land use problems. Action in a variety of areas such as off-farm employment, pricing policies, etc may help address land use problems.
- Indigenous technical knowledge (ITK) and the loop process: PLUP should try to build upon ITK so that innovations are rooted in local experience and relevant to local resources. In many cases ITK is no longer able to cope with rapidly changing conditions and so analysis of the maladjustment is necessary. A 'Loop Process' is proposed which involves understanding the original logic and rationale of ITK, analysing why it is no longer satisfactory, and then drawing on both ITK and modern knowledge to develop a set of techniques which are appropriate.
- Participatory trials and local capacity development: the key element of PLUP is the development by the local community, through in-community participatory trials, of innovations in land use and husbandry which will address problems of natural resource management. These trials will usually be part of the Loop Process and will build upon both the ITK of communities and their own traditions of research and experimentation. This will

help develop local capacity to address land use problems with minimal external assistance.

- Lateral extension: the recommendations concerning land use and land husbandry from participatory trials will be attractive to farmers and pastoralists, and so should not need to be 'sold', as is often the case with innovations introduced through SLUP. As a result innovations can be left to spread by lateral adoption, although it may be helpful in some cases to have small demonstration landscapes on farms or grazing land. New patterns of land use and land husbandry will evolve, rather than being planned.

• **Some Issues for clarification**

While the above principles are important in ensuring that land use planning helps to develop local capacity to address land use and natural resource management issues, the practical implementation of this approach will encounter a number of difficulties. Some of those which will require careful attention include:

- Community participation: community approaches are difficult as there is often considerable economic diversity within such groups. There is a danger that participatory approaches are dominated by those who are economically and politically powerful. Hence it may be necessary for facilitators to work with groups of similar socio-economic status within the total community.
- The nature of participation: this must not be limited to providing information and assisting in implementation. The local community must have the power to determine the content and priorities of PLUP and control project resources.
- The preconditions for participation: participation requires a set of circumstances which give people control over their own future. This requires appropriate policy environments as well as local powers over natural resources. Hence PLUP initiative must support local communities in pressing for positive changes in these areas, as well as

focussing on local problem-solving activities.

- Facilitatory role and skills: facilitators have to work with farmers and pastoralists on an equal footing and be willing to learn from and with them. As a result there are no automatic benefits of status which at present accrue to 'educated' field staff. As a result, considerable dedication, even a missionary zeal will be required of these facilitators, so making it important to train and orientate them correctly.
- Relation to national institutions: while the emphasis in PLUP is upon on-site trials and building on local knowledge to develop skills in communities, there is a need for links with national environmental surveys and the work of research scientists on research stations. This requires the development of two-way communications between communities and these national services, with the activities of the latter driven in large part by the needs of the communities.
- Village level co-ordination of individual decisions: while individual land users should have control over their land and natural resources, there is a need for some community and regional institutions to co-ordinate land use and husbandry. These organisations will address issues where there are impacts of land use on neighbouring sites, pressures upon community resources, and inter-community competition for land and other resources.

• **Policy and institutional implications**

The PLUP approach to land use planning at the local level has institutional and policy implications. The most important of these relates to the institutional links which land use planning requires. It is suggested that there needs to be clear links with adaptive research and national development policy formulation, while less emphasis is needed on ties with soil surveys etc.

A second implication is that land use at the community level must not be determined by

national land use policies, but rather should evolve out of the actions of farmers, pastoralists and their communities. Land use and land husbandry must not be the result of policies imposed from above, but the result of co-operation between national institutions and communities, with decisions left as much as possible to the local communities.

A third implication of the more holistic conceptualisation of land use and natural resource problems, is that the resolution of many problems requires greater involvement of the local population. Hence there is a clear link between the technical/institutional changes proposed here and political moves towards greater pluralism and democracy.

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