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Local level adaptive planning: Winners and local losers in machakos district, Kenya

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Participation cannot be effective if it stays at the extremely local level. The decay of local government institutions and of local government's independent revenue limits local people's power to influence; it increases that of civil servants, consultants, and aid agencies. This situation can only be changed by a conscious political decision of the government concerned.

The Machakos Integrated Development Programme (MIDP) was the first District level-planning programme, launched in 1978 with European Development Fund (EDF) aid. In principle, its planning was to be integrated, decentralised and participative.

In an evaluation carried out after the first four years, we found that it was effectively decentralised, but to the district level officers of the central Government Departments. There was a structure of Location, Divisional and District Development Committees, in which local leaders participated, which were in theory consulted at the outset on the planning. They identified water as a primary need, and this was reflected in the allocations of money under the programme. This was, however, effectively the end of participation in planning (participation in work continued to be desired for financial reasons). The choice of watersheds to be developed with dams and conservation measures were made on the grounds of technical possibilities and administrative convenience.

Integration implies a top-down approach, since the experts decide which activities should be integrated. It meant activities were concentrated in certain areas, whereas the County Council, the only elected body in the District, would have preferred a more even spread of activities around the district.

Decision-making was adaptive, in that the District Steering Committee met to receive reports and adjust plans on a monthly schedule. Its decisions were rubberstamped by the District Development Committee, a large and not very effective body meeting about 3 times a year. On this, elected representatives such as the local MPs and officers of the County Council were completely outnumbered by officials of Government Departments.

Machakos is noteworthy for the activity of self-help groups, and for the effectiveness of its coffee co-operatives. These organisations carry out activities within the area of a sub-location or location. However, one also needs an institution that can decide priorities, make allocations of scarce resources, and look at the overall benefits and losses of programmes that necessarily affect several areas. Inter-location issues are typical of environment-related programmes: a dam may be required in an upstream location to supply a downstream area; forestry protection on the upper catchment may be in still another administrative area. The institution carrying out this function is either the District Steering Committee, consisting of civil servants, or the local representative of the co-ordinating Ministry (formerly Planning, now the Ministry for the Reclamation and Development of Arid and Semi-arid Lands) together with the consultants they appoint. The civil servants are mostly only in the District on a temporary basis.

The consequence is that an immense reservoir of local knowledge and talent is not utilised. The Machakos Co-operative Union, for example, had imposed on it in the 1978 plan a credit programme for food crops and cotton which its members had not requested, but which the experts of the Ministry of

Agriculture thought desirable. Both programmes failed for reasons which the unconsulted Union officers and members could probably have forecast. It is quite possible that an elected body would have preferred to move more resources into animal health, and to reduce allocations to crop support. A political body is required to make such decisions; if it is left to the Ministries each will seek to preserve its budget for existing activities. It is quite apparent from the formulation document submitted in 1990 to the EEC for the third phase of MIDP that the plan has been prepared by (local) consultants in consultation with line ministries, but without any input from Divisional or Location Planning Committees, or from elected County Councillors.

A revision of policy towards elected bodies is the responsibility of the government and people concerned, though we know that outside bodies could influence this, as they do on other matters, if it became part of structural adjustment programmes. Where it is part of government policy, as in Zambia, aid agencies can give assistance for the training and restructuring required.

In countries where such restructuring is not on the political agenda, there are nevertheless some ways in which an increased local input into planning can be encouraged.

Firstly, we should not underestimate local capacity to work the present system. The Akamba, for example, are extremely good at lobbying. When they do not obtain what they want through official channels, they exercise pressure through their MPs, through NGOs, through Machakos-born officials in senior positions, and by various other means. Examples can be given of them obtaining official aid and NGO grants for the projects they desire. The successful localities are, of course, those, which have influential and effective leaders.

Secondly, some of the local NGOs are themselves strong and effective. This includes, for example, the Catholic Diocese of Machakos. Some of these NGOs are participation minded and have developed means by which people can exercise influence over planning. Where, as in the case cited,

they cover the whole District, they are to some extent obliged to make decisions about allocations by geographic region and by priority sector. Co-operation with District-wide local NGOs is therefore one means by which outside agencies can assist local level adaptive planning.

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