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Helicopters at Nhlangwini

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• Introduction

The Nhlangwini Integrated Rural Development Project aims to empower local people to improve their quality of life, by helping them to develop strategies for addressing their basic needs.

The Nhlangwini Ward is situated in southern KwaZulu/Natal, South Africa, 80 km inland from the Indian Ocean, and about 220 km south of Durban. It consists of broken topography, varying in altitude from 300 to 800m above sea level, and including two deeply incised river valleys. Mean annual rainfall is ± 700 mm. The ward has an area of approximately 200 square kilometres, and a population of some 25,000 people, with many of the adult men and some of the adult women living and working away from home, mostly in Durban, Johannesburg, or the gold mines. The actual population is 75% female.

The participants¹ in the workshops were all involved with the Nhlangwini Project, which is run jointly by the University of Natal's Institute of Natural Resources (INR) and the Planned Parenthood Association of South Africa (PPA), a privately funded non-government organisation. The small farm systems research and extension approach has formed the conceptual framework of the

¹ The participants were: Nkalokazi Qoza, KwaDeyi Mazeka, Pungashe Memela, Ndwebu Sibiyi, Pungashe Sosibo, Ndwebu Mtolo, Echibini Dlamini, KwaGubuzi Hadebe, Maria Trost Xesibe, Ndwebu Qoza, Ndwebu Mdiwe, Fodo Caluza. The facilitators were: Michele Friedman, Institute of Natural Resources (designed the workshop); Herman Dlamini, Institute of Natural Resources; M A Hadebe, Planned Parenthood Association; Raymond Auerbach, Institute of Natural Resources.

project, with the emphasis on the involvement of local people in development planning.

The twelve women from the Nhlangwini area are all primary health care workers with the project, each working in her own neighbourhood. They have called themselves *abasizi*, a Zulu word meaning 'helpers'. Their work in the area has contributed towards a significant opening up of attitudes to the discussion of the role of women in society, and has resulted in the involvement of both men and women in an on-going debate on who should take responsibility for contraception and on how couples decide when to have children.

• The workshops

Three workshops were held over a period of three months during 1989. The first examined the development problems in the areas from which the *abasizi* come, the second specifically probed those problems associated with family planning work and the third was a development planning workshop which used some visual techniques, which are described in some detail in this report.

Problems identified in the first workshop included the lack of domestic water, the poor maintenance of those handpumps which had been installed, the lack of creche facilities, the need for facilities for handicapped children, the lack of clinic facilities, poor roads, inadequate schooling facilities, lack of adult education, lack of firewood, insufficient community gardens and the need for organisational skills, especially in the community gardens.

The second workshop concentrated on the way in which the *abasizi* carry out their work and

the problems which they experience. It was agreed that one of the best places to talk about family planning was the local spring, while fetching water or washing clothes. Community gardens were also seen as good venues for discussion. Although some house-to-house visits were carried out, much of the discussion occurred during casual encounters.

The generation gap is a problem, and it was suggested that younger people should be trained, so that they can communicate more easily with the youth (four young women have since been trained, and are making a valuable contribution in this sphere). Care is taken to inform parents about the kind of work which is being done. Although there are some who object to any discussion of sex and contraception, most accept that young people are being helped to make responsible choices.

Initially, men were reluctant to discuss any sexual matters, especially with women, but people seem to have accepted the importance of the work of the *abasizi*, and men have begun to come to the mobile clinics for condoms.

As Zulu society tends to be patriarchal, with women expected to remain silent during public meetings, it was interesting to note that the *abasizi* generally felt that their positions had made them leadership figures in the community. They were sensitive to the implications of their role as 'unelected' representatives, and open to the idea that they should, in fact, be accountable to the local community.

The low level of remuneration which they received (only intended to cover expenses) was not seen as a major problem, although it was acknowledged that more would be welcome, especially if the range of activities was expanded to a more formal commitment. The main additional activities which were considered important were a range of agricultural extension activities including vegetables, fruit trees, field crops and nutrition education.

• Rural development overview

Although the first two workshops were useful in understanding local problems and attitudes, it had proved very difficult to gauge what participants felt were important development priorities; the third workshop therefore concentrated on two activities: resource identification and prioritisation of development needs.

Initially, participants were asked to draw a picture of the resources in their area, as seen by a bird or a helicopter flying overhead. After much hilarity about the alarm with which a helicopter might be greeted by certain people who grow *insango* (marijuana), who might think that a police raid was imminent, there appeared to be general understanding of what was meant by 'resources', and the *abasizi* set to work, each person drawing the resources which she felt were most important in her area.

Some, like Mrs Sibiya, made pictorial lists of the resources (Figure 1). Others like Mrs Qoza (Figure 2) used a more spatial technique. Figure 1 shows a water pump '*owuphukile*' (but it no longer functions). Other resources include Mr Maphumulo who sells goats, Shibase's bus service, the store, the church, the primary school, the dam and the community garden.

Participants were reluctant to draw the resources which they would like to see in place in two years time: "That which is there, we know; how shall we draw things which are not there?"

They were, however, prepared to list '*izinto esizidingayo*' (those things which are desirable). The six most common items were then prioritised as follows:

1. Water;
2. Roads;
3. Schools;
4. Clinics;
5. Creches; and,
6. Firewood.

Figure 1

Figure 2

It was generally agreed that agricultural development was also important, including vegetables, fruit and field crops both for home consumption and for sale. Participants were emphatic that they did not wish to be relegated to subsistence production only: "The great need in the rural areas is for money". The women felt that although decisions about field crops had traditionally been made by men, the men are usually away working in the towns as a result of South Africa's iniquitous migratory labour system, and it is in fact the women who now make these decisions.

• Conclusion

The value of the technique was that it enabled people who had felt unable to discuss the development needs of the area in an abstract way to participate in a planning process designed to help establish project priorities. Based on these results, the whole focus of the project shifted from agriculture to water development. The emphasis shifted from technology transfer to organisation development and an increased awareness among project staff of the importance of the process of developing a vision for the future which is shared by the broadest possible constituency.

A key point in the proceedings was when Michele Friedman took three of the problems identified by the women and suggested that they were all manifestations of a lack of communication, and that they highlighted the need for organisational development. The problems were:

- although handpumps had been installed in the area, there had been inadequate provision for community involvement in their maintenance;
- although several dams had been built by the KwaZulu Department of Agriculture in order to supply water to communal gardens, pipes had not been laid from the dams to the gardens; and,
- a man had consulted Mrs Mazeka about the use of condoms in contraception, and had used one without explaining to his wife what he was doing and why.

The result of all three of these experiences was anger and frustration, which could have been averted by adequate communication.

With proper goal-setting, appropriate communication structures and a sound strategic plan, the results could have been very different. This collecting together of three diverse local problems, and the highlighting of their common elements lifted the participants out of the concrete realm of local problems, into a more abstract realm where reflection on the nature of development problems could be informed by the real experiences of local people. Methods of developing water-committees which involve the women who are using the resource in the control and development of that resource were discussed.

Agricultural development needs have led to a range of research and extension initiatives, including the use of technology in maize production, research into maize production systems for subsistence, semi-commercial and commercial farmers, vegetable production in the communal gardens and the role of women in agriculture in the area.

• Further reading

The INR has produced several reports which may be useful to those desiring more information about the project and our work on participatory techniques in rural development as well as our sustainable agriculture programme. These are available at a modest charge from:

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