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## SOCIAL SOUNDNESS ANALYSIS

A central substantive concept of USAID policy is the need to assure the wide and significant participation of the poor in the development process. In this sense, "**participation**" means not only sharing the economic benefits and contribution of resources but also involvement in the processes of problem identification and solution, sub-activity selection and design, implementation and evaluation. The participation approach to development demands that USAID activity designers and implementers have a much deeper understanding of the sociocultural meaning of activities than has been required in the past. (**NOTE: While the guidance on this and other types of analyses refers to an "activity" as the intervention being analyzed, analysts may prefer to conduct such analyses at a higher level of intervention where the component parts of such an intervention lend themselves to a common, combined analysis.**)

Social Soundness Analysis has three distinct but related aspects: (1) the compatibility of the activity with the sociocultural environment in which it is to be introduced (**its sociocultural-feasibility**); (2) the likelihood that the new practices or institutions introduced among the initial activity target population will be diffused among other groups (**i.e., the spread effect**); and (3) the social impact or distribution of benefits and burdens among different groups, both within the initial activity population and beyond.

The analyses and factors listed on the following page are not intended to be of equal weight and significance. For some activities all factors will be important; for other activities some factors will have higher significance than others. For example, it is believed that motivation is a key factor, which will be crucial to any activity. Some other factors may be equally important or may fade in significance if motivation is extremely high. The point is that there will be interplay between social factors and the activity design. These factors are not meant as hoops through, which the activity must jump rather they are seen as real features of the terrain on which the activity is proposed to operate. Just as a road's design must be suited to the physical terrain so must many activities be adjusted to the particular social terrain - some features of which will present major design questions while other features may not affect the activity or, indeed, may be counted upon to significantly boost the probability of activity success.

## **A. Sociocultural Feasibility**

Assessment of sociocultural feasibility requires first that values, beliefs, social structure, and organization is taken into account.

The best method for determining the feasibility of desired results and supporting activities is to know the existing social landscape. There is, for instance, a growing body of literature about the small farmer. He is depicted as an industrious person who, with the proper incentives and resources, will respond immediately. But many nations where subsistence agriculture is strong and traditional social relationships stronger are not readily going to turn into collections of individualized model small farmers.

Second, is the necessary contextualism of development measures. A successful introduction or innovation should call for the least amount of social disruption consistent with the attainment of strategic objectives and intermediate results. How does a new crop relate to the existing agricultural economy? How likely is it, given the investment costs, that most poor farmers could grow it? Would it be better to improve existing methods of production in the small farmer and subsistence sector? Gandhi's famous use of the spinning wheel in his promotion of Indian economic self-reliance is an example of brilliant contextualism. Part of the context of the activity will be the social structure involved; i.e., the groups and power relationships with which the activity must cope. At issue will be: can the existing social structure be used, perhaps with some changes, to expedite the desired result(s) or is an alternative structure necessary.

Third, it is important for activity design to demonstrate that things assumed to be a benefit by the donor are similarly perceived by the customer. An important principle to be established in finding out what is a benefit is the importance of working from the subjective image that people have of their own circumstances to the devising of measurements that can be agreed upon by donor and customer for dealing with these problems. What is the meaning of unemployment? What is human distress?

Finally, any understanding of the impact of an innovation upon a culture should involve an understanding of the cultural baggage or demands carried by the innovation, i.e., what demands will the activity make on people to take on the characteristics of the donor's society?

## **Who Lives Where?**

A certain amount of basic data against which to assess both sociocultural feasibility and the likelihood of the desired spread effects of an activity must first be acquired. A first step should be a mapping of the area to be affected by a strategic objective, intermediate results and supporting activities in such a way that population density and location, ethnic or significant tribal affiliations, language, religious and political orientation, are all depicted in relation to prevailing patterns of economic activity. This would involve overlay mapping the predominant mode of production in terms of the implied sets of social relations. For example, in agricultural activities; is agricultural production carried on by family units, wider based kin groups, or individuals? What is the predominant mode of ownership in each locality: is it a system, which vests ownership in individuals or groups?

Groups in local areas should only be identified if they appear to be distinctive, e.g., religious groups, diametrically opposed political parties or tribal groups, different ethnic groups; groups, who for some self-help reasons, act on the basis of a perception of their difference from other groups.

## **How Are They Organized?**

Development activities can entail creation of their own organizational structures using scarce local resources and imported technical and managerial inputs which would be difficult for any country to replicate on a large scale. It may be best to start with an organizational unit that is already locally familiar. In many countries legal recognition of traditional tribes or lineages as corporate groups would enable these entities to trade, hold property, sue and be sued. Modernization efforts, which replace the lineage or trade, may entail creation of several unfamiliar and different cooperatives, organizational forms such as individual land tenure, registrations and business law. Replacing the traditional form of organization may thus require new sets of legislation and new sets of Government workers. Use of the traditional organization could maximize existing knowledge, patterns of leadership and entrepreneurial skill. The level of organization specialization in development organizations should be determined by the present social and economic organization of potential activity customers and not the degree of specialization thought necessary for the most efficient dispatch of Government business. This said, the case for sticking with existing organizational forms is not clear-cut. To a considerable degree the organizational context of the activity can impact the desired result(s); use of closely held, traditional power centers, which do not adequately represent customers, to administer an activity can assure its failure. New organizational forms can be difficult to start and expensive, but they can create a climate of change necessary for development as well as bring about better use and distribution of activity resources.

In sum, no prejudgment is made on whether existing or new organizational units should administer the activity. But the importance of this question is considerable, as it will entail who gains and who may lose from the activity. These considerations will help answer the following questions from a social perspective: What is the basic organizational structure through which the innovation should be channeled? Should a new organization be created or will existing local Government or village organization be sufficient? Note: whichever choice is made will affect power relationships since resources and responsibilities are involved. Will the organizational structure chosen be likely to enhance the likelihood of a positive spread effect for the desired result(s)?

### **Allocation of Time**

It is unwise to assume that people will respond to economic incentives which to external donors or indigenous officials seem adequate. Lack of response to such incentives should not be viewed as irrational behavior but as reflecting the weight of concerns and priorities other than profit maximization, such as avoidance of risk, strength of non-material values, fear of retaliation, threat to status and/or security, or preference for leisure. For example, if 70% of workers' time is spent on subsistence agriculture necessary for the maintenance of family life and 30% on cash crop production, a labor intensive scheme that would seek to double monetary incomes may well run into difficulties. It is really vital to assess the amount of discretionary time available to potential activity participants. It is also necessary to know the existing allocation of time for males and females, including seasonal variations.

### **Motivation**

What would be the motivation for participation in development activities developed to produce a desired result(s)? This involves placing oneself in the position of significant groups, adopting their point of view, and trying to work out the likely reaction. Is the need for the activity actually perceived and accepted by potential customers? Often the rationale for an activity is really only understandable in the light of information possessed by top management in Governments and development agencies and not shared with prospective customers. In other cases the rationale for a given result(s) may be understood by prospective customers but not accepted by them because, rightly or wrongly, they do not perceive it to be in their interest.

A definite motivation must be assigned to each significant group that is expected to participate; it should be the actual motivation of that group and not what someone imagined would be the motivation if he or she were a member of that group. For example, in one group motivation may be a desire for increased

power and prestige; another group may desire reward; another group may be moved by patriotism because of a key role the activity may play in the nation's economy; a desire for their children to have better opportunities, for increased leisure time, for increased efficiency, or even competitiveness may be important.

It must not be assumed that all motivations are conducive to development, as we perceive it. If it is found, for example, that a certain population wants an activity because it will enable the male farmers to retire their female charges into virtual isolation, a very fundamental question about the activity will have been surfaced. Motivation, then, is two-fold: What incentive or perception is needed to interest a given population in an activity and what will be the population's disposition towards the probable gains from the activity?

### **Minimum Customer Profiles**

It should be possible to construct a profile of the potential customer. This profile must specify the minimum requirements, i.e., level of education, resources, skills, attitudes, etc., which would make individual participation possible as well as the maximum attribute possession which might tend to discourage participation on the part of various individuals. A minimum customer profile will emphasize who could reasonably be expected to participate. Mobility and motivational data will give numbers and locations. Where, at minimum, is the activity to affect? What is the basis for this estimate? How, at minimum, are customers expected to adopt new patterns of behavior implied by adoption of innovation? What is the minimum, in terms of extension contact, media contact, or contact with opinion leaders, necessary to secure lasting benefits from the program? What is the longest period of time envisaged for the adoption of innovation?

### **Matching Customers and Activities**

When data on the nature and location of groups and the customers' profiles are compared, it should be possible to identify and locate those who probably will participate. This would mean that against the background of proposals one could roughly estimate where the potential customers were located and how many could reasonably be expected to become involved. These potentials could be quantitatively mapped out on charts. The charts would reflect where and with what kinds of groups a particular type of activity could actually be executed and where it should be executed to achieve maximum effect. Who will not participate directly in the activity? How will successful execution of this activity benefit these people? What groups will be adversely affected, receive indirect benefits (**which they may not be aware of**) or be totally unaffected? What are the number and characteristics of such groups? Where are they located? There should be some plausible linkage, some definitely discernable relationship, between the

circumstances of those who are the activity and those who are many and who are ultimately expected to become beneficiaries.

### **Obstacles**

Armed with data on the location and number of potential customers as well as an assessment of what would have to happen if this potential is to be realized, the next step would be to identify social, political, or religious obstacles to activity implementation. These obstacles, if overcome, should result in self-generation of desired activity result(s) to encompass a predefined target area.

Those groups, which stand to lose or gain nothing as a result of satisfactory activity implementation, should be identified. Any change in patterns of resource allocation, deferred consumption, or elimination of inefficient or wasteful practices will worsen the position of some groups. For example, a cooperative may be opposed by private businessmen; family planning measures may be opposed by religious groups or doctors; mechanization may be opposed by unions; ethnic groups may oppose aid to other groups; creation of government monopolies may be resisted by private interest; private consumer groups may oppose paying for services which stem from attempts to improve institutional performance.

### **Communications Strategies**

How to communicate with potential activity participants in the activity and spread areas is a priority problem which is often complicated by the cultural distance between change agents and prospective participants, especially when the latter are rural, poor, uneducated, and/or belong to different ethnic, linguistic, or religious groups. Successful communication requires devising a communications strategy, identification of points of origin and points of destination, the process of communication covering who does what, and the content, nature, and frequency of the communication. The extent to which modification and improvement of existing materials is required can be determined. News media links, radio, papers, personal contacts, etc, may have to be instituted to avoid bottlenecks. Decisions should be taken on the timing and frequency of messages, the need to have customer feedback so that necessary improvements can be made, and the best type of media for particular situations.

What to communicate in order to encourage participation is the next problem. Emphasis should be on the advantages to prospective customers, notably increased incomes and/or improved well being. Few development programs or activities explain the economic and social logic behind development measures to potential customers. But it is, or should be; true that achievement of a significant change will enable creation of a better environment. These kinds of national or

regional goals can be made meaningful through communications strategies at the local level.

## **B. Spread Effects: The Diffusion of Innovation**

Since there are not enough resources to mount enough activities to ensure that every poor person or family can become a direct customer of activity aid the achievement of spread beyond the initial activity target population is a crucial issue in the design and appraisal of activities. Ideas and assumptions about how to produce activity spread effects are still at the theoretical stage. It is, however, generally recognized that ability to achieve significant spread effects will be a critical factor in determining the developmental impact of activities, which aim to help the poor. The impact of many activities has been on the relatively well off and the outcome of activities in which the very poor are the customers has proven hard to predict. Desire or capacity to participate in development activities is often low among the very poor and it seems reasonable to suppose that as the target group for activities shifts more to the poor, the achievement of spread effects is likely to become even more difficult.

Activity designers have often not dealt adequately with the achievement of spread effects. As a result, years after the completion of the activity, the level of results is far higher in the original activity area than in the areas that were supposed to be encompassed by spread effects. For example, attempts to improve institutional performance have often been successful but only for the institution directly affected by the activity. There should be a statement relating results (**activity target figures**) to existing levels of income and productivity, both in the activity and potential spread areas.

Resources are concentrated in an activity area in order to reach the critical level thought necessary for development. But the potential spread area where development is to take place, and where spread must take place if the activity is to justify itself in terms of the strategic objective, requires additional consideration. Spread effects can provide a linkage between the conception of an activity and the validity of a strategic objective or intermediate result(**s**). Planners should try to know how many activities must be located in what areas, among what kinds of people, with what probable result(**s**), in order to give effect to a strategic objective. Each proposed activity should have an explicit treatment of activity spread plans.

The achievement of spread effects is a genuine inter-sectoral and interdisciplinary problem. Achievement of spread effects must rely heavily on economic insights but also requires a geographical dimension because of the need to consider climate, environment, demography, and relationships involving space and location; it requires a sociological dimension because of the need to

assess values and beliefs in relation to behavior; it requires a psychological dimension because of the need to assess motivation and to devise and construct a communications strategy; and it needs an ideological dimension because the issue of who gets what and why is a political and cultural matter.

The concern here is with sociocultural rather than technical constraints on the spread of a technical or institutional innovation beyond the initial activity population. It thus involves applying many of the considerations discussed above in connection with the feasibility of the activity in its initial setting to the broader population to which spread is intended. These considerations include the social characteristics of the population, how they are organized, how they allocate their time and can be expected to respond to incentives, their motivations, minimum customer profiles, obstacles that can be anticipated, and communications strategies. The following paragraphs deal with some special considerations which, while relevant for the initial activity population, are especially significant for achievement of spread effects.

### **Leadership/Authority**

In each area to which spread is intended it should be possible to ascertain who are the most respected leaders. It should be emphasized that often support from such figures far outweighs the best efforts of good extension workers. Special attempts should be made to ensure the support of such people. Such individuals may well perform in their communities the same role that extension personnel perform in the area of immediate activity impact and on that basis it may be reasonable for the government to recognize the quasi-official nature of their work by giving them such reasonable assistance as they may request. It is necessary; however, to ascertain the interests of such individual groups (**partners**) and be confident that they are not in conflict with desired results and social aims.

It is important to delineate the characteristics and functions of leadership in the various groups. For example, where individual choice is not heavily circumscribed by social obligations or institutional regulations, it will be useful to know who the opinion leaders are and where they are located. This includes understanding how leaders exercise authority. The support of such people may ultimately be vital to the success of policies aimed at securing the adoption of a technical or institutional innovation. These leaders may not by themselves be involved in the activities; instead, they may be political or religious leaders, high officials, or even the most senior citizens. The issue that has to be resolved is who are the leaders - both modern and traditional - whose support or cooperation or lack of opposition will be essential to the success of particular activities? **(The answer to this may be that alternative organizational structure/leadership may need to be a necessary part of the activity.)**



## Patterns of Mobility

Where do people migrate to seasonally or permanently? Where do they go to work, to market, to shop, to look at demonstration farms, or for leisure? Each group of people will have a radius of mobility, or outer limit beyond which there will be few personal contacts. Establishment of this locus and radius of mobility would be of great importance in decisions to locate activities and/or in the decisions about extension work or improvement of institutional performance.

With the mobility radii for various groups in a country, patterns of movement might be broken down for significant activities, e.g., agricultural, trading, religious, so that estimates of the most frequented places of personal contact could be identified. Where seasonal activities are involved, the time of the year and the length of time involved might be of utility.

At the same time, also, the typical mobility patterns for officials could be noted on the same basis, that is to say maximum distance traveled from home stations and locations of home stations and areas visited, activities, duration of contacts with clients, and frequencies of such contacts.

It may be helpful to plot movements within the radii of mobility insofar as contact with opinion leaders is concerned. Then, with data on the nature and location of media, it would be possible to obtain a good idea of how the average person receives information. Information mobility should be assessed. The information inputs into a community can be charted out to attach weighting in terms of effectiveness and cost.

Particularly with educational activities the question of vertical mobility becomes crucial as the success of such activities depends upon whether vertical mobility is possible.

In effect, the attempt should be to try to establish the process for learning and the adoption of innovation.

## Previous Activity Design and Execution

Very few activities are actually new in conception or design; they may be smaller or larger, they may be in new areas or have some new dimension, but there is usually a discernible relationship with the past. Cause and effect are difficult to determine. Frequently, increases in productivity may occur due to causes that have nothing to do with an activity (**such as the construction of a road into the activity area**) though often it is claimed that they have occurred because of an

activity. Is there any evidence to show that spread effects occurred as a result of successful execution of previous activities?

It has also been found that often a "new" activity has a history of trial and failure under earlier governments, including the colonial administration. This history may tell a great deal which can help the analysis of the "new" activity.

### **Maximum Information and Resource Distances**

What has to spread? Does spread involve knowledge, techniques and methods, plant and genetic material, livestock, etc.? There are obvious constraints on the distribution of physical resources such as plants and livestock and the limitations of other forms of spread can be assessed by examining communications data as well as the data on mobility.

Most activities adopt a short time horizon. Often, development needs to be conceptualized over a fifteen or twenty year period. The timing of most activities is predicated by the implicit model of inputs and outputs. It will take so long to obtain seed and fertilizer, so long to achieve a herd size of some figure or other; it is very seldom that time horizons takes into account how long it takes to learn or acquire the new methods and techniques that are required for social change. How long should be allowed to assure that desired spread effects are under way with reasonable prospects of continuing?

Spread effects must be planned and worked for rather than assumed to occur naturally. Traditional activity planning has emphasized the vertical relationships of a personal nature between officialdom and customers. But spread often involves horizontal relationships between communities, farmers or media inputs. Spread effects can be understood more adequately when more comprehensive social data is collected. If reliable data has been obtained it should then be possible to estimate more accurately the actual numbers of potential customers and resources required achieving change.

### **C. Social Consequences and Benefit Incidence**

Both the activity itself and its spread to a wider population will affect different groups in different ways. Some groups will be better off and some worse off. The increasing concern with reaching the poor and those groups hitherto largely by-passed in the development process - such as women - creates a special need to identify the differential social impact of an activity and particularly how it will affect the poorer groups. The most effective opportunity to consider benefit incidence is at the initial stage of activity conception and formulation. At this stage it is still possible to reject an activity designed to achieve a specific result if

its other social impacts are regressive, to modify it to make it more compatible with equity objectives, or to consider appropriate compensatory measures to rectify the damage or losses to those who are likely to be adversely affected. At this early stage, it is important, therefore, to identify, as explicitly as possible, **(a)** the group(s) who the activity is intended to help, **(b)** those who are likely to be adversely affected, and **(c)** those who may be indirectly affected (**either positively or negatively**) such as ultimate consumers of a basic product, the price of which is reduced or increased. In other words, how are the benefits and burdens of the activity distributed among different geographical, functional (**e.g., farmers, herdsman, farm laborers, construction workers**), or communal groups and what is the socioeconomic standing of these groups relative to the national or regional level of income and well-being?

On assessing benefits incidence it is necessary to bear in mind that the customer of the goods and/or services provided under an activity is not necessarily the person to whom the major benefits of the activity accrue. A tenant farm family, for instance, may receive new seeds, fertilizer, and credit to pay for them and their yield may rise. But the landlord may raise the rent and appropriate the lion's share of the incremental income flow. In order to continue to rent the land at the new (**higher**) rent the tenant farmer must continue the new practices; but this will involve bigger inputs of labor on the family's part and perhaps greater risk. How much benefit accrues to the farm family? Or a farmer may adopt new practices and his yield may double, but the price of his/her crop drops so much as a result of other farmers doing the same that his income rises very little (**and the family may have to work harder and assume greater risks**). The beneficiaries are those who pay lower prices for the food they consume, such as landless laborers and employees who get new jobs in factories, public works, etc. made possible by the drop in the price of wage goods.

Identifying the incidence of benefits is somewhat like identifying who bears the burden of indirect taxes; both involve how much the benefit (**or burden**) is passed on.

As noted above the adverse effects of activities and the groups affected should be identified as clearly as possible with a view to modifying the activity or compensating those adversely affected, especially if they are members of the poorer or underprivileged social strata. For instance, agricultural activities which make access to productive resources more unequal, promote the concentration of land in the hands of a few farmers, and encourage labor replacing mechanization tend to aggravate discrepancies in levels of living, reduce employment opportunities, and accelerate migration to the cities. All of these probable results involve social and often economic costs, which need to be taken into consideration.

Assessment of the distribution of the benefits and burdens can make use of the data and insights obtained about the customer discussed above in connection with sociocultural feasibility.

In dealing with equity and benefits incidence a limited number of criteria seem especially important for assessing the social costs and benefits of activities. These criteria are as follows:

1. Access to resources and opportunities (**e.g., land, capital, credit, education, markets**) and in what ways and to what extent such access is broadened (**or narrowed**). The questions to be identified and analyzed under this heading would include, in the case of an agricultural loan, trends in land tenure arrangements and how they would be affected; the availability to target farmers of improved inputs (**seeds, fertilizers**), implements and the credit with which to finance them; access to technical information and to markets, including the existence and extent of farm-to-market roads; and how price policy, including taxes and subsidies, affect the target group. This criterion measures the potential effect of the activity on the distribution of wealth and income.
2. Employment. In a sense this is a special case of access to resources and opportunities (**i.e., productive work**) but because of its special importance it deserves to be treated separately. Among the issues to be covered here are factor intensity and the related question of the amount and type of employment to be generated or eliminated as a result of the activity, as for instance by the introduction of labor-absorbing or labor-replacing practices and equipment. It is especially important to consider and predict the implications for target groups, which are already characterized by serious unemployment/underemployment, such as urban and rural unskilled workers, the educated unemployed, and women.
3. Rural displacement, migration, and urbanization. This criterion is concerned with what groups might be pushed off the land or in other ways uprooted as a result of the activity, where they would be likely to move to, and how they would be reabsorbed into the economic and social life of the country.
4. Changes in power and participation as between the target group and different socioeconomic, regional, ethnic, and other groupings and the implications thereof for public policy. Each of the three preceding criteria is related to the redistribution of power and of opportunities for participation, but it is necessary to recognize how such shifts affect the capacity of different groups to influence public policy.

In analyzing the social implementation of an activity considered under each of these four criteria, precision should be stressed and quantitative data should be developed wherever possible. Quantification clearly is easier for some criteria, such the employment affect and the access to resources of target customers, than for say the effect on the distribution of power and influence. Despite the difficulties of measurement, quantification, and even if only in orders of magnitude, remains important to support the qualitative analysis. Where quantification is not possible, specificity should still be stressed as much as possible.

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