Adapting to Resource Development

Before real progress can be made in resource development, basic questions must be answered by policymakers

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Resource development requires competence and organizational skills that vary from those used for traditional Extension programs. A variety of policy and organizational situations must be considered if Extension is to address its energies to this relatively new program emphasis. Among these are the structures of organizational procedures and goals, of public support systems, of work orientation and incentive systems for professional staff, and of the university base for Extension. The authors undertake a systematic analysis of such ideas in this article.

INCREASING emphasis on resource development in Cooperative Extension has led to reappraisals of organizational goals and allocations of resources. This paper analyzes some characteristics of the organization which tend to facilitate or inhibit adaptation of Extension to this relatively new program area. Some suggestions are also made for internal adjustments to meet the changing situation.

Regardless of the varying views held by Extension staff about the "ideal" program, the decision has been made at the federal level that the broad area of "resource development" shall become an increasing concern of Cooperative Extension. This decision is reflected in the creation of new positions in the Federal Extension Service with full-time responsibilities related to resource development. The recession of 1958 triggered other similar efforts in the federal government. The concern with poverty in the sixties is a continuation of the same general orientation.

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In addition to this concern in government with resource development, there is an increasing public acceptance of economic and environmental planning as a legitimate endeavor. This acceptance was hard won and was perhaps hastened by economic decline in many areas, but it has meant more public support for this kind of activity. Again there has been encouragement from the federal government in the form of subsidy for local planning. Organizational structures have been established for the explicit purpose of planning.

It is against this background that resource development has been emphasized as a proper Extension activity. It has been executed with varying success from state to state.

A New Program Emphasis

What are the characteristics of resource development programs? For purposes of this paper, we shall define resource development as the public effort to improve community life, building upon the bases of human as well as physical resources. This includes such projects as attracting industry, developing recreational facilities, promoting tourism, conducting programs of manpower training and retraining, improving the "cultural" atmosphere, and a host of other activities.

Following is a list of features which we feel distinguish resource development from traditional Extension programs (Extension has been involved in resource development from the beginning; hence, this new emphasis is one of degree rather than kind):

1. Resource development implies a more general orientation to the total population and not just the agricultural community of "old friends." Problems are not limited to agriculture and home economics.
2. Work in resource development involves a wider base of clientele; it means working with different organizations, agencies, and people. This demands that new linkages be established with a wider range of publics than before.
3. Different subject matter is also involved. Agents commonly have the reputation for being experts in agriculture or home economics; development work often involves them in fields other than those in which they have been trained. Methods of teaching are different so that the roles of organizer and catalyst become more important.
4. A new structure has been set up to implement the program, involving a great variety of alphabetical designations—RAD, OEDP, and TAP, for example.

The Extension Organization

A brief description of the Extension organization will serve as a starting point for analyzing the probable impact of resource development (Figure 1). Figure 1 shows the three-level nature of Extension. The labels may not be the same in all states but the functional arrangements are similar. We have listed some "external publics" with which the organization has relations and whose reactions are important in matters of policy formulation and implementation. This listing is not exhaustive, but some of the more important external influences are shown. Relationships at the local level will be explored later.

Although Extension ideology generally includes the trite saying that programs are based on "grass-roots" desires and needs, many policies and program orientations have their genesis in Washington. On the federal level, Extension officials must act in relation to their external publics whose frame of reference is defined in terms of the welfare of the country. Of course, these officials must also act with-

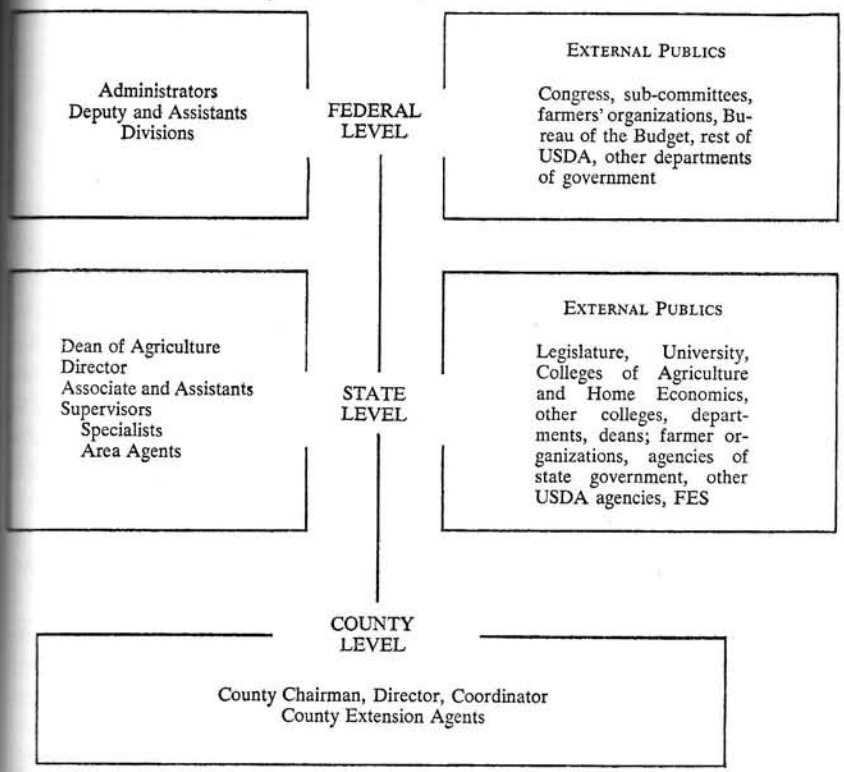

Figure 1. A diagrammatic representation of the Extension Service organization.

in an ever-shifting set of political conditions—conditions in which some programs may be more expedient than others. At the federal level most active political support has been provided by farm organizations and agriculturally oriented Congressmen.

Similar conditions occur at the state level. Administrators act within a framework of relationships and understandings which have been developed over the years. Effective freedom of action is limited for them by these relationships so that change is more often gradual than sudden. Extension administrators are personally acquainted with agricultural leaders and organizations having vested interests in agriculture. They are less familiar with industrial leaders or governmental officials extraneous to agricultural interests.

We have decided, for purpose of this analysis, to focus most attention on the county Extension agent in the system since he is, in effect, a "gatekeeper" with respect to programs. He tends to be the key person in initiating and implementing resource development activities in his county. Figure 2 is an attempt to depict some of the influences upon his decisions and actions. We have categorized these influences three ways: *internal forces,* that is, forces from within the organization; *external forces,* from his publics; and *social-psychological variables,* factors which affect the way in which the county agent defines his roles and behaves within these roles.

Internal Forces

From within the Extension organization, policies and other communications from above are designed to affect the behavior of the county agent. Specialists on the state level influence the county agent by promoting their particular programs. It appears that the most influential specialists are those in the basic agricultural specialities—animals, plants, and soil, rather than more peripheral specialists (such as those in rural sociology and marketing). Administration also affects the county agent in that there are certain designated positions in the administrative hierarchy responsible for evaluating the performance of the county agent for purposes of promotion, salary increases, and the like. The mutual expectations of the specialists and the evaluators cannot help but shape the behavior of the county agent.

Another influence on the county agent from within the organization is his relationship with fellow county workers. The suggestions and influences of home economists and 4-H agents often help determine county programs and influence program content.

Numerous outside forces impinge upon the county agent role. Although there are other relevant groups, we shall deal mainly with

local groups in this analysis. This list is not exhaustive but merely suggestive of the many organizations whose programs and philosophies must be taken into account.

External Forces

There are many local supporting groups of the Extension agent and the Extension program. There are *advisory groups* (such as executive committees), *local governmental bodies* whose financial support is often important in the program, *clientele* of Extension, and *farmer organizations* which are generally favorable to agricultural Extension work. Traditionally these support groups have been agriculturally oriented. There is a long history of cooperation between these groups and Extension; consequently, forces impinge upon the agent which tend to cause his activities to be consistent with the expectations of these support groups.

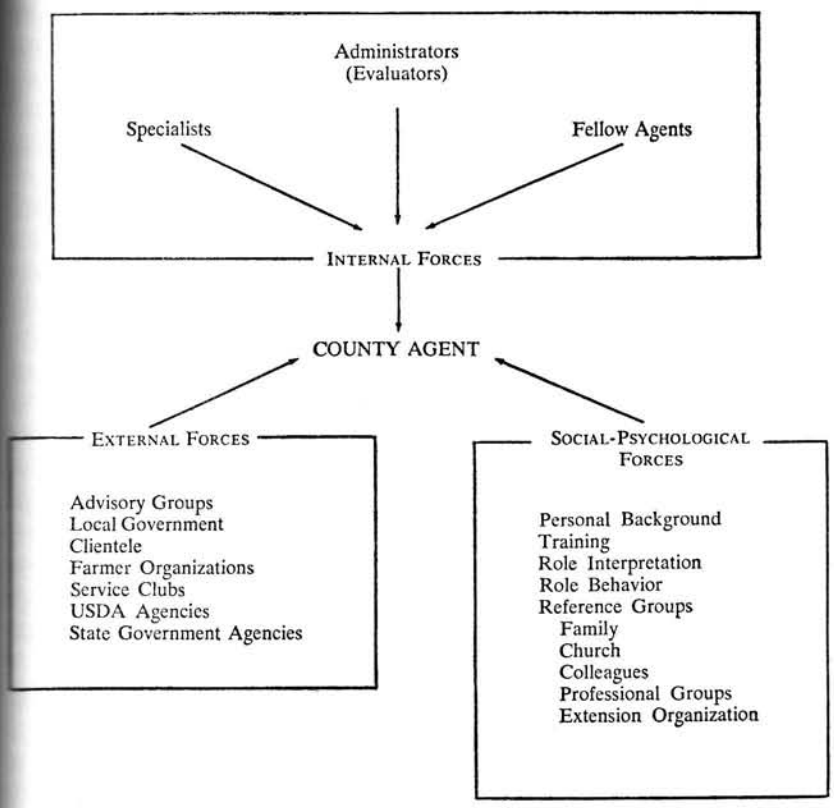

Figure 2. Forces influencing the decisions and actions of the county Extension agent.

Other local groups with whom Extension has linkages and whose programs must be taken into account by the agent include service clubs, civic groups, other USDA agencies, and various state and local government agencies. These groups also have certain expectations as to what behavior is appropriate for the county agent. Traditionally their expectations have been that the county agent is a purveyor of agricultural knowledge and skills.

Social-Psychological Variables

When the county agent assumes his position in Extension he brings to it a background and training. In most instances, this background is rural and his formal training has been in some technical field of agriculture. Some agents, unable to go into farming because of the changing conditions in agriculture, engaged in Extension work to keep in touch with agriculture. They might be called "vicarious" farmers. With rural background and training, agents commonly have internalized attitudes and values which are common to rural people—attitudes about the importance of agriculture in the national and local economy. The ways in which they interpret their roles and behave in these roles are influenced by their attitudes and values.

Agents also have several reference groups that influence their role behavior. These groups include the family, the church, other local groups (such as the parent-teacher association), and, perhaps more important for their specific role behaviors, colleagues and the professional groups to which they belong. One source of possible conflict within the role is the degree to which the county agent identifies with his fellow county agents and the degree to which he identifies with the formal organization. The criteria for judgment and evaluation in these groups may differ. Therefore, it is important to consider what factors motivate the county agent and in what sorts of activities he can gain recognition and professional advancement.

In the case of many county agents, there is a lack of confidence about engaging in development work because it does entail technical subject matter with which the agent may not be familiar. He has the self-image of an expert, has the reputation of being an expert in agriculture and often feels inadequate in dealing with other subject matter. Moreover, many agents view this resource development program emphasis as something which might very well pass away, as previous program emphases have passed. He already has a full-time job working with agricultural people and often is not highly motivated to take on additional tasks for which he sees no tangible reward.

BALANCE SHEET

Following is an attempt to construct a balance sheet consisting of factors facilitating and factors retarding the assumption of resource development work by county agents.

First, the county agent has traditionally had a unique role in the community as a representative of the university, as a man who has subject-matter competence and organizational skills. He can call upon the resources of the university and specialists in Extension to assist him with specific problems. Second, he has a favorable reputation because he has had success as an expert. He has built social capital which he can use. Third, he has access to key people in local areas, particularly in agriculture.

Retarding factors include, first, the fact that many county agents see no real local support for their engaging in development activities. Their support groups are agricultural and often very jealous of the agent's time. In a recent Pennsylvania study,[1] only about half of the county agents perceived farmers as approving Extension becoming involved in rural development activities. There are, undoubtedly, counties in which local people are ahead of the county agent in seeing the need for development work. At any rate, the important factor is the agent's assessment of this support or lack of support. Second, and probably even more important, is the agent's perception of a lack of organizational support—that is, a lack of rewards within Extension for agents who take on resource development activities. Is this lack of support real and what are possible reasons for lack of support? (This, no doubt, varies from state to state.)

Accompanying legitimate power in any organization are the processes of *decision making* and *initiation of action*. At both the federal and state levels, persons who have legitimate organizational authority have the responsibility for policy decisions and program emphasis. With respect to resource development work at both these levels, there appears to be a certain tentativeness.

At the state level, there are influences on administrators from various sources. One of the more important groups with which Extension maintains linkage is the state legislature. Although there is a definite shift from rural to urban control, in many state legislatures agriculturally oriented legislators are still the key supporters of Extension. Since the legislatures help provide financial support for Extension, state administrators are sensitive to the attitudes of rural

[1] T. B. Jurchak and E. J. Brown, *Extension Agents' Perception of Rural Development,* Extension Studies No. 14 (University Park, Pa.: Cooperative Extension Service, The Pennsylvania State University, September, 1961).

legislators. In addition, agricultural pressure groups are often quite potent at the state level. These groups normally want to retain the exclusive attention of Extension for farmers. Extension administrators at the state level are often cooperative because of their own rural backgrounds, traditions, and values, and because they do not see a major support base emanating from nonfarm organizations. So, with respect to resource development, there seems to be a "wait and see" attitude.

County agents are well aware of this orientation at the state level. As mentioned previously, most county agents have a full-time job with agriculture, and they view development work as something extra. In addition, this type of work commonly involves unfamiliar subject matter and unfamiliar groups. The agent often feels inadequate and out of place, partially because his role in this kind of endeavor is largely of his own making.

Implications

It seems that before real progress can be made in resource development by Extension, certain basic questions have to be answered by policymakers—by those officials within the Extension social system, at all levels, whose function is to make decisions and initiate action. These questions are the following:

1. Is resource development work a necessary role for Cooperative Extension?
2. Assuming an affirmative answer to 1, what priority should the work have? Put another way, should the goals of Extension be altered, should resources be re-allocated, should status-roles be redefined and should organizational adjustments be made to facilitate resource development work?
3. Making another, and perhaps less safe, assumption that the answer to 2 is also affirmative, what organizational adjustments are necessary?

It appears that some of the following procedures would help stimulate organization activity in this program area:

1. Provide incentives for personnel at all levels, but particularly at the county level, to engage in resource development work. Such incentives probably must first come from within the organization in the form of promotions, salary increases, and recognition for good work.
2. Develop and use new criteria for evaluating performances within the organization. Traditionally, supporting groups and administrative officials have encouraged farm production work on the part of the county staff; visits to farmers, work with specific

commodities, and the increasing of farm income have been used as criteria of success. This emphasis may have to be adjusted in the light of changing agricultural conditions and the increased need for resource development activities.

3. Either establish additional positions on the county level or redefine existing job descriptions, if agents are expected to take on development functions.
4. If resource development work is important, it will no longer be sufficient for county agents to be trained in an agricultural or home economics specialty. They will need broader training in a number of subjects, including the social sciences. Increasingly, the agent role involves organizing and working with groups of people. Of course, this is also true in agricultural work, but even more so in development.
5. More research in resource development activities will be needed in order to provide practitioners with the necessary body of knowledge and with guidelines for successful program development.
6. At all three levels, the support of a wider range of groups and power figures must be gained than in the past. New reference groups will have to be developed and advisory groups must be expanded to represent new clientele.
7. University structures will need to be altered or new communication channels developed in order to make the total university resources available to field personnel. This means establishing mechanisms to tap departments and agencies within the university which do not have traditional relationships with Extension and the College of Agriculture. An appraisal of the proportion of production specialist positions to total specialist positions should be considered.
8. Finally, the image of Extension, projected for many years as being exclusively agricultural, will need to be altered. (We know that image is not accurate, but most people do not.) A few solid accomplishments in resource development would go a long way toward changing people's impressions regarding the organization.

The effectiveness of organizations can be judged by the degree to which they are able to meet the following conditions:[2]

1. Define goals or purposes and mobilize resources to achieve those goals.

[2] Basil G. Georgopoulos and Arnold S. Tannenbaum, "A Study of Organizational Effectiveness," *American Sociological Review*, XXII (October, 1957) 534-40.

2. Maintain organizational flexibility by adjusting to internal organizational changes and by successfully adapting to externally induced changes (the resource development emphasis is one means of adapting to a changing society).
3. Resolve intra-organizational strains and conflict between subgroups—activities must be coordinated and unified into a single entity. In some counties, the three program areas (adult agriculture and home economics and 4-H) are, for all practical purposes, separate and only tenuously related programs. Resource development activities would seem to provide an opportunity for establishing unifying relations.

Three alternatives for the future of Extension were proposed by Vines and others:[3] (1) provide informal leadership in agriculture, home economics, and related topics; (2) provide informal leadership in agriculture, home economics, and related topics plus educational leadership for community and resource development in rural areas; and (3) broaden Extension's educational leadership to include all informal educational programs in both rural and urban areas as a university-wide program. Fessler[4] suggested what was primarily a revision of number 2 alternative as a means of providing for better fulfilling the needs of people regardless of where they live. In this paper we have attempted to explore the consequences of some possible organizational adjustments if this alternative as revised by Fessler is chosen.

[3] C. A. Vines, Lowell H. Watts, and W. Robert Parks, "Extension's Future," *Journal of Cooperative Extension*, I (Winter, 1963), 239-46.

[4] Donald R. Fessler, "Alternative to Extension's Future," *Journal of Cooperative Extension*, II (Fall, 1964), 170-2.

A PARADOXISM: Be concise—nothing is worse than continually belaboring a point once you have made it, subjecting the listener to endless explanations which, far from clarifying the subject, becloud it through the attempt to discover ill-conceived explanatory devices, none of which are able to clarify the initial premise on which the original point was based and which might have been a matter of essential simplicity, had it not been for the attempt to so clarify it by verbiage which compounds the complexity with unessential thought. —HUGH DOWNS.

WE LEARN WISDOM from failure much more than from success. We often discover what *will* do, by finding out what will not do; and probably he who never made a mistake never made a discovery. —SAMUEL SMILES.