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Taking a New Look

Elements for a new approach
to agricultural extension

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Introduction

We start from the premise that donor agencies concerned with rural development normally work through intermediary institutions in order to reach the local communities. These “intermediaries” in many cases are NGOs; in other cases they are public sector agencies, but they may also be trade unions, federations, associations, cooperatives, technical services or training organizations, parishes of the Catholic church, and other institutions which are part of civil society.

A weakness in this scheme is the fact that intermediary institutions have formal commitments to the institutions that provide financial support, while their links with the target populations do not go beyond a moral commitment. The intermediary institutions respond to the donors. This has an effect on the orientation of their actions as well as the quality of the services provided: the final beneficiaries do not have the option or the right to demand anything from the intermediary.

“Taking a New Look” is a new approach, whose basic premise is: respond to the user or final beneficiary of the services delivered.

Taking a New Look at rural development to focus on families of small producers is an approach based on the following assumptions: the services offered are defined as products (not as favors); the persons interested in the products are identified as clients (not as beneficiaries); and the co-financing must be negotiated among those who offer and those who demand products.

Tegucigalpa, April 1998

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1. Intermediary institutions in development: Reflections on actors and their relations within rural development

Analysis of the most common scheme in development activities

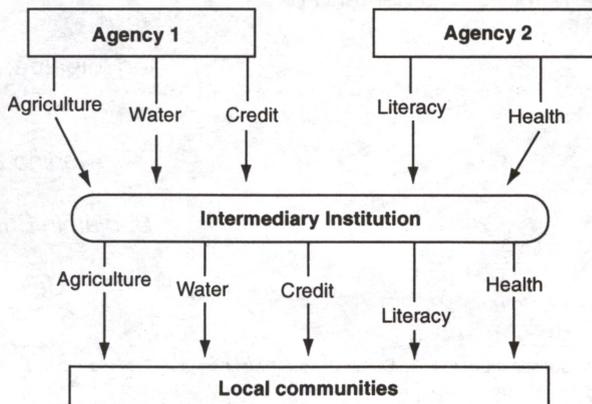
Existing linkages in many rural development projects are based on three main actors: the donor agencies (and their local representative), the intermediary institutions, and the local communities involved.

The main types of intermediary institutions that can be involved in development work under the two schemes described on the following pages are:

- Private development organizations (NGOs)
- Second-level grassroots organizations
- Companies / enterprises
- Trade unions, associations, cooperatives
- Different levels of government: projects of central level organizations, decentralized entities, local governments, etc.
- Churches

The first situation is seen frequently.

Scheme of Development Project 1



The characteristics of this scheme are:

1. The donor agencies do not have direct contact with the local communities

Contact between donor agencies and the target population is indirect and is carried out through the intermediary institution.

2. The intermediary institution develops a broad scope of activities

There is a tendency to encompass a variety of sectoral activities, with the justification that this contributes to the welfare of local communities. These types of projects are similar to those of "integrated rural development".

3. There is a need for coordination among agencies

The fact that two or more agencies support the work of an intermediary institution in the same region, with the same population, results in the need for coordination among agencies.

4. The intermediary institution and the agencies are not interested in independent local communities

This scheme does not contain any mechanism to motivate agencies and intermediary institutions to take a special interest in the formation of self-managed and independent local communities.

Another frequent type of institutional presence in rural development projects is the second situation presented in the scheme on the following page.

The main characteristics of this second scheme are:

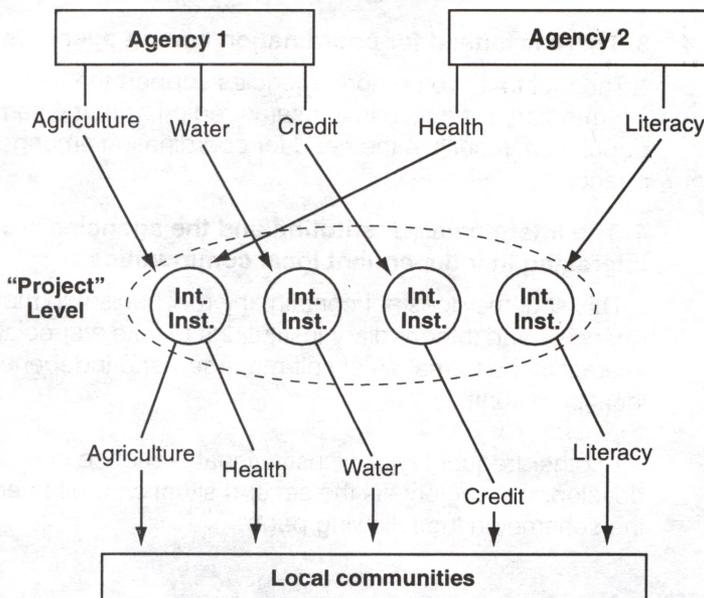
1. The agencies do not have direct contact with the local communities

As in the previous design, contact with the local communities, who are the intended beneficiaries, is indirect and is carried out through intermediary institutions.

2. The intermediary institutions tend to be specialized

The diversity of actions considered necessary to foster development are shared among institutions with specialized knowledge and experience.

Scheme of Development Project 2



3. There is a need for coordination among agencies

Two or more agencies support the work of several intermediary institutions working in the same region with the same population. It also may happen that several agencies support the same intermediary institution.

4. There is a need for coordination among intermediary institutions.

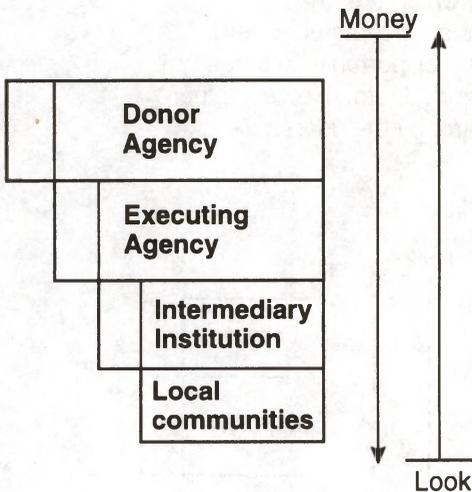
The implementation of complementary activities with the same population groups makes for timely coordination among these actors.

5. The intermediary institutions and agencies are not interested in independent local communities.

This scheme does not have either any mechanism that would encourage the actors to take a particular interest in supporting the formation of self-managed and independent groups among the population.

***The direction of the look
as an indicator for the central problem***

Scheme of the cooperation cascade:



This scheme represents the different actors who frequently come together in rural development.

The illustration consists of the actors, the flow of financial resources, and the direction of the look.

The size of the squares has been chosen arbitrarily.

Main characteristics

- Part of the financial resources originally available are left behind at the level of each actor.
- The look, i.e. the need to respond to someone

(accountability), goes in the opposite direction of the financial flow. The clearest expression of this mechanism is the reporting system: from the executing agency to the donor agency and from the intermediary institution to the executing agency as a representative of the donor agency. The local population normally behaves by not giving way to ill feelings to the staff of the intermediary institutions.

- The rationale of all development activities is to provide benefits at the local level. Curiously, the actors in development have a perspective that leads them in the opposite direction and the local communities, who supposedly are the ones that benefit from the results of the development activities, have no chance to object or to question the offer they receive.

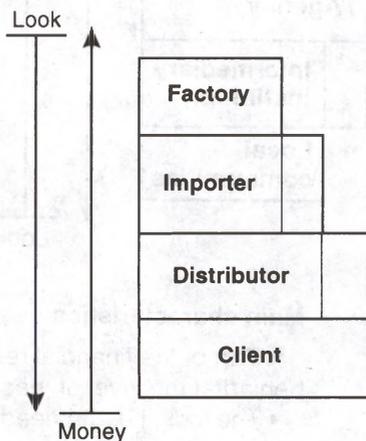
- Services, i.e. the support that the intermediary institutions provide, are dictated by what they can offer: the institution does what it is able to do, and what it deems a priority.

- The quality of technical assistance or training services depends on many factors, among which are, the appropriateness of the recommendations; attitudes and behavior of the technical teams; the opportunity in time; the fulfillment of the commitments acquired, etc. However, there is actually no effective quality control by the users.

The new look:

This chart analyzes the mechanisms involved in the example of buying a car or a bicycle. This is an interesting example for observing the effects of another perspective.

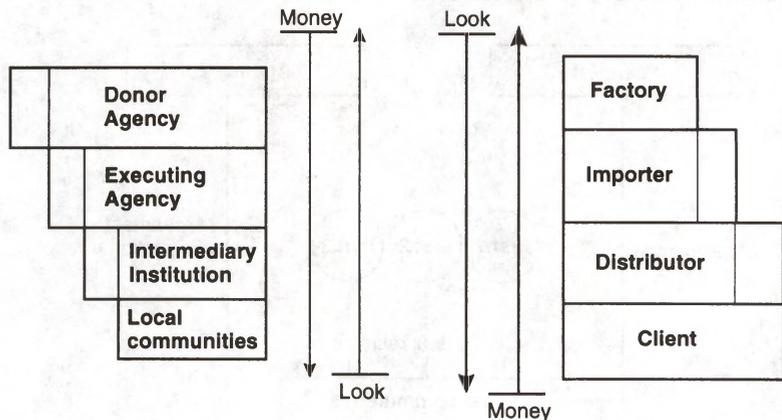
Of course, we do not mean to suggest that in development it is sufficient to apply the same mechanisms that function in the purchase of goods in the market.



Main characteristics:

- The user or client has the chance to complain about the product (the bicycle).
- The reference point in the production process is demand: vehicles or bicycles that break down frequently, that have ugly colors, or that are not delivered on time, will be replaced by others as a result of the purchasing behavior of the clients.
- Actors at top levels in the production cascade have a vital interest in satisfying the clients' demands. If they do not, they will be out of business: this is true for the distributor, the importer and the factory.
- Quality control is not a matter of ethics or moral commitment: it is an existential interest at the three upper levels of the cascade in order to provide a quality-cost relation the client is ready to accept.

Comparison between the two different cascades



This is not a matter of minimizing the role of the different actors in the cooperation.

Much less is it a matter of trying to pretend that you can support development in the same way that you sell bicycles or cars.

But it is a matter of looking for ways to avoid the disadvantages of the present system. Changing the direction of our look on certain relationships can contribute to this.

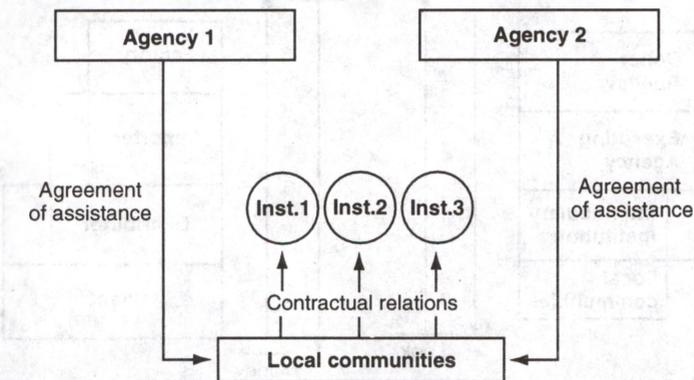
The strong point that we observe on the right side of the above diagram is the fact that it is the interested party who buys a product.

Taking a New Look

Taking a New Look by changing our perspective can contribute to making the best use of available resources in an effective and efficient manner. Our new scheme proposes that the interested parties pay for the product they want to obtain, always having the option of negotiating the co-financing of the products.

What we are seeking for are the advantages presented by the cascade on the right side of the diagram, without abandoning the objective and the particular characteristics of development.

A way of Taking a New Look on the relations between different actors is the following:



At a theoretical level, this scheme combines the advantages of both sides of the comparative chart previously presented.

Quality of service is guaranteed through a relationship similar to that between a supplier or seller and a client (contractual relations).

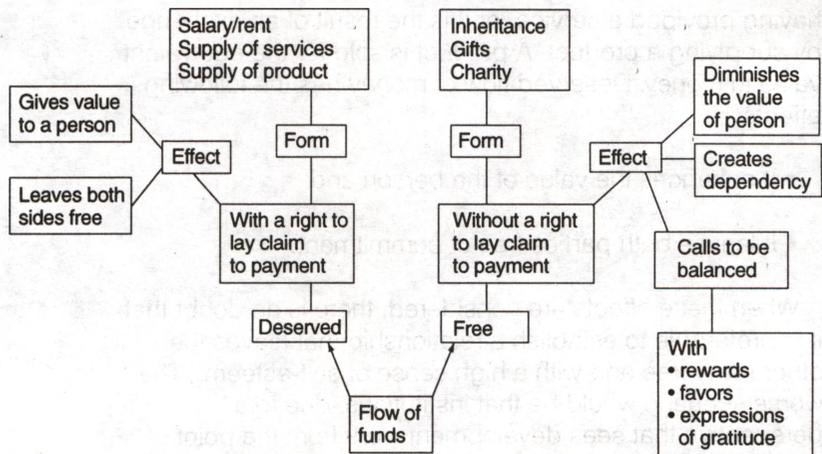
Agencies continue subsidizing activities that the local communities cannot pay for completely with their own resources.

There are multiple options for combining the mechanisms of subsidizing and of being a client at the same time.

2. The transformation from beneficiary to client: The flow of funds in agricultural extension projects

Effects of the flow of funds

In our new perspective, the way the funds are flowing has serious consequences for the task of development cooperation. In current development procedures, the so-called counterparts are reduced to being beneficiaries. They have no right to claim for collaboration with NGOs, much less with donor agencies. The beneficiaries are at the mercy of the benefactors. This fact, more than any other, prevents local communities from being empowered, an objective which is officially proclaimed by all development agencies.



For example, there are two ways of passing money between two parties. One way is free of obligation for both parties, and the other involves compensation for supplying a service. The free-of-obligation form does not entitle the favored party to the money, product or service it receives.

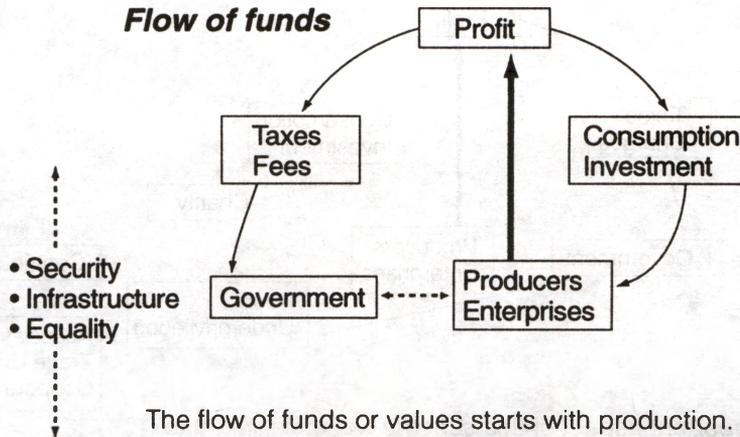
Giving money free of obligation depends completely on the decision of the person who gives it. Examples of this form are: inheritances, gifts and charity. This form can have the following effects:

- It diminishes the value of the person who receives it
- It creates a certain type of dependency
- It requires that the beneficiary give something in return, be it through compensation, favors, or expressions of gratitude.
- Although it can be very pleasant to receive an inheritance, it is almost always true that whoever receives it has done nothing to deserve it. This person's self-esteem is not enhanced, nor does he earn the appreciation of others.

On the other hand, money can also be received when it is deserved, which entitles the person to receive a payment. The deserved manner could be: earning a salary or receiving monthly retirement income. Money is received for having provided a service, or it is the result of an exchange by supplying a product. A product is sold for the equivalent value in money. Deserved flow of money has the following effects:

- It enhances the value of the person and
- It leaves both parties free of commitment.

When these effects are considered, there is no doubt that it is preferable to establish a relationship that leaves the other party free and with a high sense of self-esteem. The worse scenario would be that institutions, due to a perspective that sees development work from the point of view of social workers and benefactors, are trying by all means to convert communities, groups and individuals into beneficiaries.



The flow of funds or values starts with production. Before thinking about distributing money, it is necessary that something be produced. This may seem trivial, but it has important implications for the way the decisions over the flow of funds are being taken and how it is organized.

In order to be able to make flow funds, the producer has to earn a profit. From this profit he will pay government taxes and, on the other hand, he consumes what he has left over or makes new investments in his business.

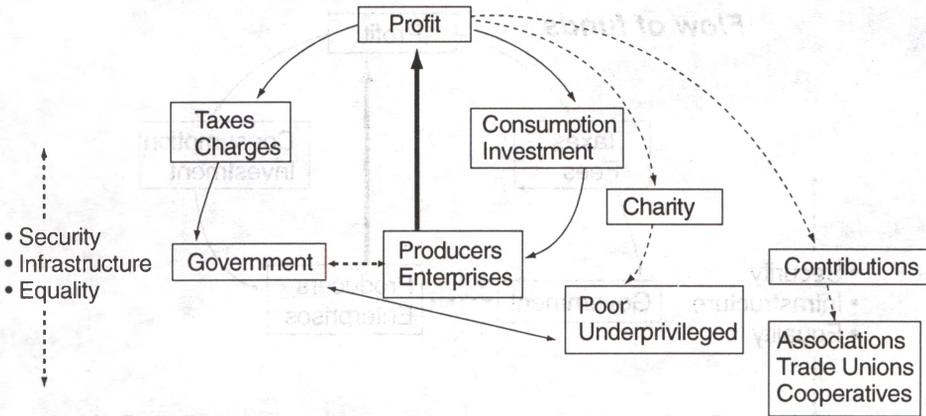
In turn, the government uses the income from taxes and charges to accomplish its tasks, among which are:

- Maintaining a safe environment so that citizens can live and produce.
- Providing the necessary infrastructure for the population to perform economic and social functions.
- Making sure that there is relative equality within society.

We refer to relative equality because there can never be perfect equality. However, it is important to avoid excesses to preserve security and reduce the risk of social unrest.

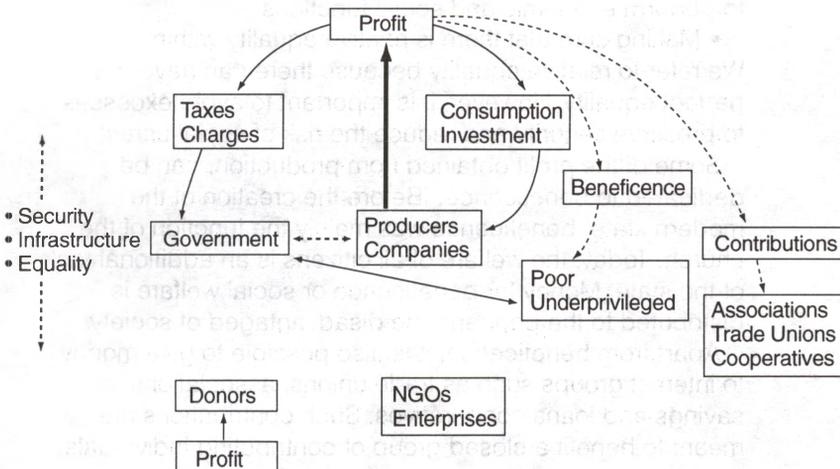
Some of the profit obtained from production, can be dedicated to beneficence. Before the creation of the modern state, beneficence was mainly the function of the church. Today, the welfare of all citizens is an additional task of the state. Money for beneficence or social welfare is distributed to the poor and the disadvantaged of society.

Apart from beneficence, it is also possible to give money to interest groups such as trade unions, associations, or savings and loans cooperatives. Such contributions are meant to benefit a closed group of contributing individuals.



The important aspect of this scheme, which is linked to the previous one (effects of the flow of funds), is that the actors can claim both for services and payment. The government collects taxes to carry out its functions and the citizens are entitled to their rights, including the right to obtain help, when they feel that they are disadvantaged.

So far we have analyzed the closed system of a state. When we refer to the particular case of development work, donors and donor agencies come into play. They also obtain their funds from profits or surplus, but these are earned outside the system we have been analyzing up to now. Therefore, donor agencies can behave differently from governmental institutions.



In practical terms: what are the implications for the behavior of donor agencies, for the representatives of these agencies, and for the persons who have to collaborate with these agencies? The most important thing to consider is the fact that donor agencies come from outside the system. They have a separate life, where there are no possibilities to claim any rights, so that they would be obliged to contribute to a task or a project. The donor agencies are free to decide about the management of foreign funds, over which the existing local system has no authority.

There are five areas where agencies intervene within a given system:

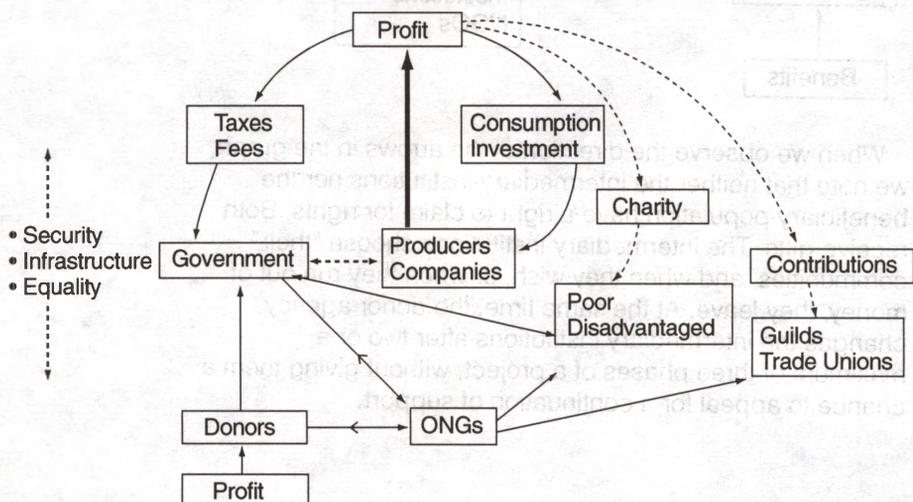
Beneficence/Welfare: Donor agencies support welfare agencies that aim to help the poor and the disadvantaged of society.

Equality: Donor agencies support efforts to guarantee the equality of all citizens, particularly the poor.

Interest Groups: Donor agencies support local groups interested in their self-development (associations, cooperatives, etc.).

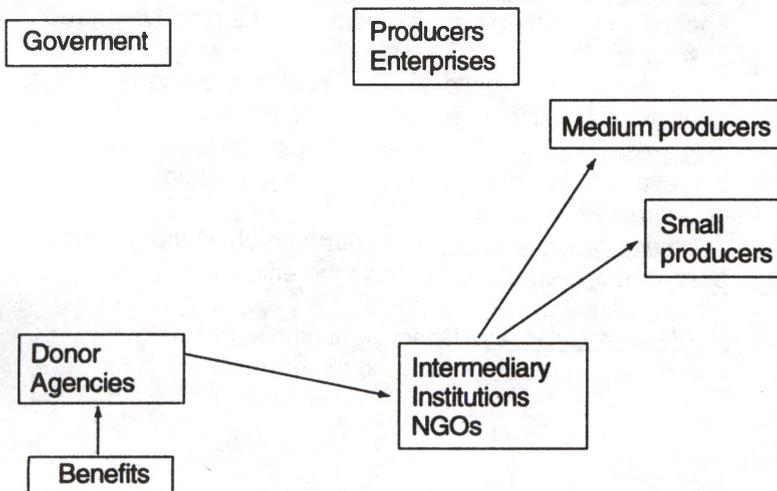
Administrative efficiency (governmental): Donor agencies collaborate in efforts to increase the efficiency of government administrations.

Private enterprises: Donor agencies support private enterprises in order to increase their profits.



How Cooperation Agencies Function

The profits or surplus of producers from any country that donates funds are channeled through its taxes to an agency, and finally, to a development program. Like those of all donor agencies, this program will have specific objectives, for example: promotion of sustainable agriculture on hillsides through conservation techniques and crop diversification. Intermediary institutions with similar objectives can apply for funds. The intermediary institutions come into contact with the population of small producers, providing them technical assistance, training and other services.



When we observe the direction of the arrows in the graph, we note that neither the intermediary institutions nor the beneficiary population have a right to claim for rights. Both receive gifts. The intermediary institutions choose "their" communities, and when they wish, or when they run out of money, they leave. At the same time, the donor agency changes the intermediary institutions after two or a maximum of three phases of a project, without giving them a chance to appeal for a continuation of support.

If we recall our conclusions on the effect of the flow of funds, we see that, in this case, the institutional system is working in a way that takes away power from the target population and makes plain beneficiaries out of them.

As has been shown previously, receiving a free service distorts relationships among the counterparts. It is even worse when well-intended activities meant to empower the population result in a contrary effect, diminishing their power. How can this mechanism be corrected though?

The answer is simple: sell products or services to interested parties, treating the population as free individuals who choose their own alternatives to meet their needs. Let us imagine possible discussions among representatives of the intermediary institutions: "For Gods sake, how can we charge a price to the poor? the miserable? the unhappy? the weak?"

This raises another question. There is no doubt that every service has its price. No one works and no one should work free of charge. Employees of the intermediary institutions always earn a salary (even when they demand, at the same time, labor free of charge from the leader farmers).

Farmers are also perfectly aware of the fact that all services must be paid for. When they hire a service themselves, they pay for it; when they provide a service to other producers, they demand that they be paid for it, and with due reason, as they have to maintain and feed their families.

Recommendations regarding the five intervention points

Beneficence/Welfare:

Contributions in the form of charities have negative effects. First of all, they exempt higher-income strata in the local society from their responsibility to fulfill their obligations of mutual assistance.

In the second place, any assistance takes away power from the person receiving it, diminishes his/her value and puts the person in a position where he/she is being treated as weak and incompetent.

As a result: it is better to avoid this type of help and invest funds in interest groups. It is preferable to invest funds in improvement of local public services or in cases when charity is required, it should be combined with the assistance provided by the wealthier population of the country.

Equality and the Goods of Common Interest

It is important that local governments take responsibility for equality among their citizens and for their common welfare. Health, infrastructure, education and conservation and protection of natural resources are some aspects of this responsibility. We can observe that the concept of the goods of common interest is evolving, particularly regarding the perception of goods that are of common interest on a global level. Interest in protecting natural resources goes beyond national borders. For example, climate is a factor which affects the world population at a global level. There are rivers that cross the borders of several countries, and anything that happens upstream affects the people who live downstream.

For this reason it is important to remember that the goods of common interest are the business of the government in any country, and it should be financed by tax revenues.

Even when an NGO invests in activities related with a good of common interest, the government should retain control, since it will eventually have to take over one day.

Interest Groups

When donor agencies, through NGOs, collaborate with interest groups, these groups often have funds available which allow them to carry out activities that go beyond their own capacities. They realize courses, organize workshops and establish an administrative system which exceeds their needs as well as their capabilities. As soon as the foreign funds run out, the interest groups go bankrupt or they find out that they need to look for aid from another donor.

Consequently, the donor agencies and the intermediary institutions would do well to remember that the activities of

interest groups must eventually be paid for from the profits or benefits of the same group.

Interest groups must be responsible for administering their funds from the outset. Only in this manner will they be aware of their expenses.

Donor agencies must seek ways to route funds directly to the interest groups so that these, in turn, can contract the services that they deem useful and necessary.

Efficient Administration

Frequently, donor agencies get in despair because of the inefficiency of government and public administration services (forestry services, health services, agricultural extension, etc.). Therefore, they decide to create a parallel service and even hire the best employees, giving them a higher salary. Instead of strengthening the public administration they help to weaken it by absorbing the most qualified personnel. Furthermore, they assume government functions which should be paid for with tax revenues.

In reality, this constitutes a subsidy coming from outside the system. This contribution is temporary, and no one worries about what will happen to the services created once the subsidies run out. Worse yet, the foreign contributions can be terminated overnight without anyone having the right to demand that they continue.

All services that are a function of the government must be paid for by tax revenues.

The tax base must be consolidated and production increased.

The population should be made aware of the fact that the taxes and charges collected by state should result in services provided by the state.

Private enterprises

The relationship between donor agencies and private enterprises are characterized by serious ideological differences. The donor agencies often assume the government's welfare function. However, in welfare there are no factors such as profit, business risk, competition, etc.

Businessmen often are considered by development workers as loan sharks and exploiters, and they forget that the target population consists mainly of producers and businessmen (even the poorest farmers are producers and businessmen at the same time). It will be difficult to work closely together while these ideological differences persist.

Accordingly, it is necessary for donor agencies and NGOs (non-profit!) to change their attitude regarding private businesses.

They must value the producer as the generator of all the flows of money and values.

Mechanisms to strengthen producers must be established.

Assistance to producers must consist of creation of new products and facilitating access to the market.

There is no need to ask whether the service must be paid for or not, the question rather is who will be paying for the service. Generally, it must be the interested party.

The following table shows the different interested parties and the details of who should pay for services in these particular cases.

How to distribute the costs?

Interest	Financed by
<p>Mainly in the interest of the producer or the individual</p>	<p>The extension service / counseling brings a direct benefit to the producer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Veterinary service • Pest control in intensive crops • Technical assistance in production (installation of irrigation systems) • Legal advice <p>Financed by producers, individuals and interest groups</p>
<p>Mainly in the interest of the society in general</p>	<p>The extension service / counseling brings a longer-term collective benefit:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of the importance of conservation of natural resources (sustainable agriculture on hillsides) • Dissemination of appropriate techniques • Information on epidemics • Preventive measures against diseases <p>Financed by the general public</p>

As can be observed in the previous table, some services mainly benefit individuals. When this is the case, it is clear that the individual must pay for the service he or she receives. On the other hand, when the benefit is mainly for the society in general, the general public must cover the cost. It is also possible to share costs among interested individuals and the society.

Soil conservation, for example, is of interest to both the individual and the general public. The producer of vegetable gardens is willing to invest in soil conservation measures as long as these guarantee a greater income or benefits that justify the investment. Then he behaves like a good businessman, making the right decisions.

However, many intermediary institutions, adhering for obvious reasons to the philosophy of donor agencies, try to convince farmers to invest in efforts from which they will never recover the profits, or perhaps only after many years and which are in the interest of others. With good reason, farmers reject the insinuations of the paid prophets who do not run any entrepreneurial risk themselves.

The challenge consists in introducing measures to conserve natural resources without losing the entrepreneurial spirit and without taking power away from the disadvantaged farmers who live on the hillsides.

There are two radically different ways to provide technical assistance:

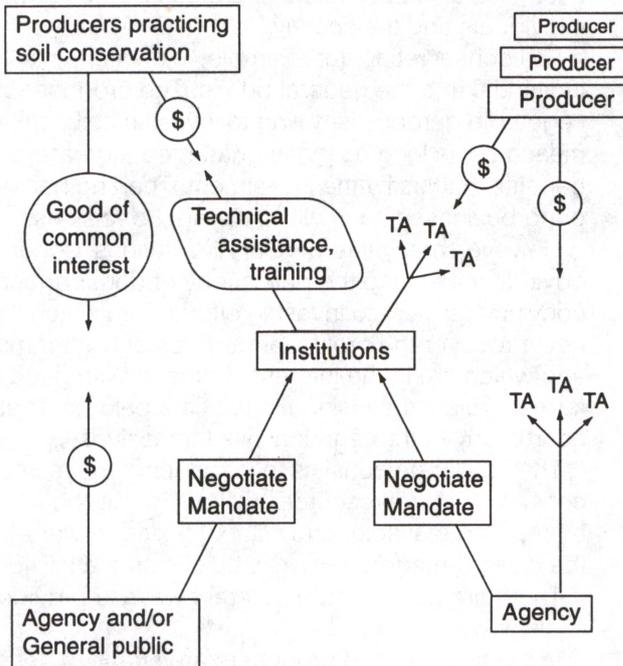
In the first one, the producers are stratified according to their capacities and contribute a certain percentage to the cost of technical assistance. We are already aware of several modalities that operate in this manner, such as the bonus system in Chile, the co-financed extension of the INTA in Nicaragua, and the privatization plan of the technical assistance of DICTA in Honduras.

It may be that the agency itself provides the service or that intermediary institutions are in charge of assisting the farmers. We already know about the effects of such systems, where the farmers demand a technical assistance service of high quality.

The greatest obstacle is the cost of the service for the farmers who produce staple food, whose price often does not obey the rules of the markets, instead it fluctuates according to the policies of the public agricultural sector.

In these cases, it is the general public that pays, through the extension service, which provides technical assistance according to the classical model.

The mechanisms described so far are found on the right side of the graph below.



Note: TA = Technical Assistance

The left side of this graph shows another procedure, where the society as a whole has an interest in the results of technical assistance and training offered to farmers.

In these cases, it is the society, the general public, that has to cover the greatest part of the costs.

The danger of this system is that the farmer can once again turn into a beneficiary of services, with all the negative effects already mentioned in the previous paragraphs. This trap can be avoided by turning the farmer from a helpless beneficiary into a seller of his products (i.e. erosion control, protection of natural resources, etc.).

Even if he makes superhuman efforts, the farmer who works on the hillsides to produce staple food, will not be able to finance his investment in soil conservation with the profits earned from his crops. However, the people living downstream will be the ones to benefit from the farmers' measures to protect the soil.

Additionally, of course, there are other organizations interested in the work of the farmers, among them all those that finance projects for the protection of natural resources. Unfortunately, financing is currently channeled to the intermediary institutions and not to the people who could really change something on their plots.

The new model shown on the left side of the previous graph illustrates the proposal that in these cases the donor agencies and/or the general public could be buyers of a good of common interest. They would pay the farmers for the service supplied, and the farmers on their part would look for the necessary technical assistance and training, dealing with the specialized intermediary institutions.

This transformation cannot be carried out overnight. There is a need for organized sellers of products based on the conservation of natural resources or on environmental services. The producers must get aware that they are able to sell a product, and they must acquire capacities for negotiation and self-administration. It could very well be a new task of the intermediary institutions to provide these capacities, together with technical assistance regarding conservation of resources.

Transition steps: from beneficiary to client or seller of a product

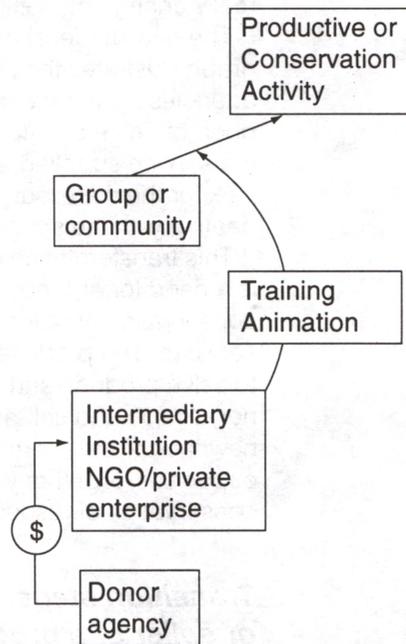
There is no proved model yet for converting the system. However, we have some ideas about how to proceed. Moreover, we invite all interested individuals and institutions to cooperate in the search for mechanisms. As soon as farmers learn about this new model, they will be able to contribute substantially with their entrepreneurial creativity and vision.

The present situation

Donor agencies finance the projects of intermediary institutions in the area of sustainable agriculture on hillsides. The activity of the NGOs consists in training and encouraging a group or a community so that it can carry out conservation activities. In this model, there are two systemic restraints. First, the producers are not motivated because the investment is not of major interest for them, and they refuse to sacrifice themselves to serve the general public.

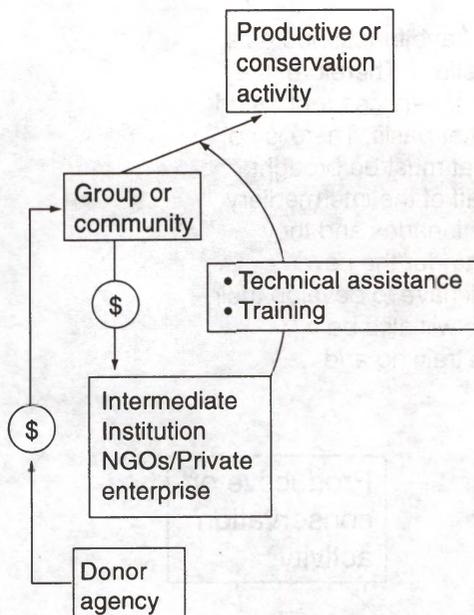
The second systemic restraint has to do with intermediary institutions. These do not have any (financial) interest to achieve training results rapidly, because as long as they still have to train and provide support, financing by donor agencies continues. If we return to the model of the Taking a New Look or the cooperation cascade, it seems as if all the actors, with the exception of the producers, would prefer the present situation and the flow of funds established. Consequently, the declarations about the development of sustainable agriculture on hillsides would be idle talk.

If the expected results consist of conservation measures realized in a great number the farmers' plots, intermediary institutions will have to modify the system in order to make this possible.



The desired situation

The donor agencies and/or the general public are financing the group, community or individual that wants to sell conservation products. If the seller (i.e. the farmer) considers that he/she needs help, be it in the area of technical assistance or regarding management and organization, he/she would call an intermediary institution



that can provide such support. The group or the community would contract the institution that gives him/her the best service under the most favorable conditions.

In this manner, both the seller (group or community) who is interested in selling many conservation products, as well as the intermediary institution, would try to train people efficiently because they consider them as their clients.

It is clear that the purchaser, i.e. the general public or the donor agencies, would have to control the quality of the acquired product or service. In the case of conservation works, the quality requirements would include the

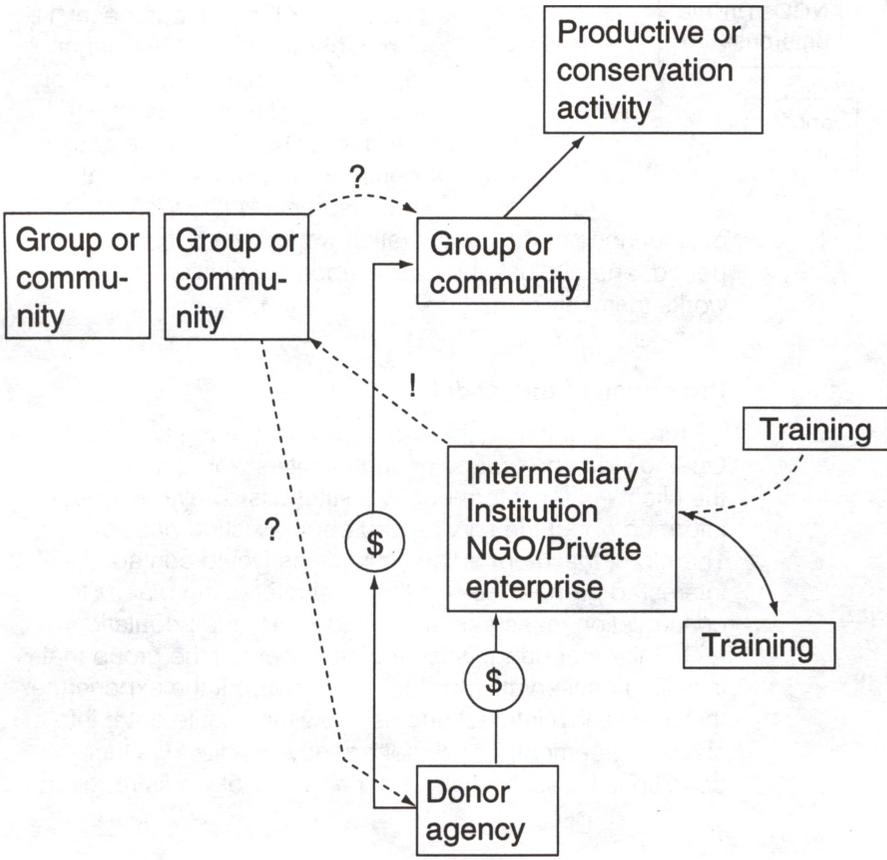
maintenance of the conservation works over a longer period, and not just the quality upon conclusion of the works themselves.

Promotion of the model

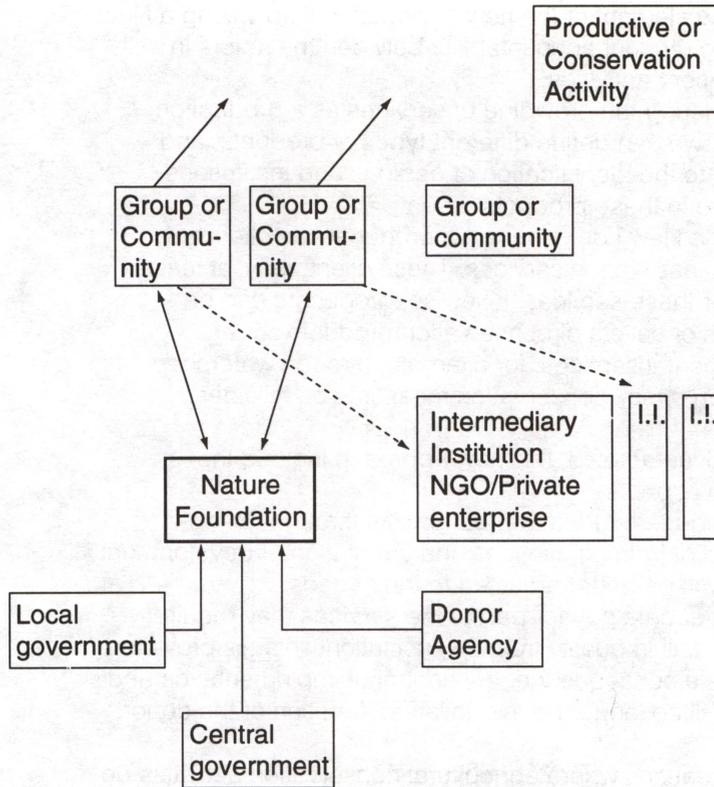
Promotion will be achieved by working along two ways. On one side, the groups or communities would have to be the clients of the intermediary institutions. They must be informed about the service and about existing possibilities. Therefore, the intermediary institutions would contact the interested groups, look for the most interesting places for conservation measures, and try to inform the population.

On the other hand, when the neighbors of the group that is selling conservation products learn about the experience, they may show interest and ask how they could enter into a similar agreement. The donor agency will disclose the conditions for such deals and the quality of works required.

The intermediary institutions, so far, have functioned as a para-governmental service offering welfare. Therefore, they are not prepared to promote and deliver services requested by groups and communities on a market basis. There is no doubt that the fundamental change that must be brought about is a change of attitude in the staff of the intermediary institutions. They are recruited as functionaries and they carry out their tasks as functionaries. Under the new approach Taking a New Look, they will have to develop their entrepreneurial spirit. In this area there will also be opportunities for private enterprises in training and counseling.



A model for the sale of “conservation products”



The local government (municipality, district, etc.), the central government and the donor agencies channel their funds through a "NATURE FOUNDATION". This Foundation manages operations with the groups interested in selling conservation products. This foundation also indicates to the interested groups which intermediary institutions could give the best training in technical assistance and self-management. The communities then choose among several institutions that provide training services.

3. Conclusions

The key element of the new approach called Taking a New Look is to reorient accountability between the actors in development activities.

Considering the providing of services as a production process, we can define different types of products, and proceed to the identification of persons and institutions interested in these products.

Taking a New Look considers producers as clients of technical assistance services. These clients pay, at least partly, for these services. Likewise, producers can be suppliers or sellers of conservation products or environmental services, for example, through watershed protection or soil conservation measures on hillsides.

The advantages of this new approach include the following aspects:

- If producers turn into protagonists through the co-financing of training services, the orientation of development actions will be better adjusted to their needs.
- If producers pay for part of the services they require, they can call in quality from the institution which is providing them. As a consequence, the control of implementation and quality will no longer be the unilateral function of the donor agency.
- In situations where agricultural conservation activities do not pay to the farmers, the rural communities can offer environmental services to interested institutions on any level, whether they are local, national or international.
- The process of adopting technologies is accelerated.
- The logic that rules this new approach corresponds to the logic of the agricultural producer who is already and simultaneously a producer, a merchant and a businessman.

In a preliminary analysis, the following open questions have been identified:

- Certain activities of "traditional" projects could be transformed and even disappear under the new approach (for example, "training on gender awareness", "training on environmental awareness").

- The need to redefine the role of the institutions that offer their services could affect or modify their own identity.
- The characteristics required by the local communities to be able to enter into this new scheme are not yet very clear (what grade and what type of organization will be necessary and adequate?).
- The new scheme supposedly also affects the role of the donors and their executing agencies.

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This analysis is based on the fact that donor agencies in rural development normally work through different types of intermediary institutions in order to reach the population. A weakness identified in this system is the way accountability is oriented: the intermediary institutions formally respond to the institutions that facilitate financial support, while the relationship with the population being assisted does not go beyond a moral commitment. In particular, the final beneficiaries do not have the option nor the right to demand anything from the intermediary institution providing the service.

This new approach, called “Taking a New Look”, proposes that to whom we respond should be the final user of the services provided. The services are defined as products, not favors. In addition, the persons interested in the products are considered as clients, not as beneficiaries.

Some experience has been gained with this approach, in countries of the South as well as the North. The basic ideas presented in this document have been generated by LBL, Swiss Center for Agricultural Extension, Lindau (Switzerland). During 1998, “Taking a New Look” has been further discussed and developed in several workshops carried out by PROASEL-INTERCOOPERATION in Honduras, with the participation of institutions of the public as well as the private sector.

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