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Criteria for Selecting the Sites of Rural Development Programs: A Case Study from North Sinai, Egypt

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Introduction

Selecting appropriate sites for Rural Development Programs (RDPs) is a key of success of these programs. Inappropriate locations for implementing RDPs could, partially, explain their failure. Among the factors that must be considered, in selecting the locations of RDPs, are the following: a) community needs assessment of the most vulnerable and needy population categories; b) conducting base-line surveys of the available potential resources (physical, human, financial, etc); in the potential locations, in addition to economic feasibility studies; c) security factors especially in the desert borders areas; d) political awareness and will to develop specific areas and regions; e) availability of infrastructural facilities needed for effective functioning of RDPs; f) community awareness related to the importance of the RDP, that positively help in the advocacy for the project and the creation of the project ownership concept among local population.

Several factors contribute to the success or failure of RDPs. For example, an (FAO, 1:2012) study of community informants' perceptions of success and failure, (1), revealed that factors of success include: a) a positive impact on the ground, e.g. improvement in community welfare; b) transformation of people's lives, i.e. improves local livelihoods; c) evidence of ripple effects outside the project area; d) improvements in people's perceptions, attitudes and self-confidence, e.g. project committee members vying for councilor's post; e) an external organization's investment in infrastructure; f) provision of a lasting solution to local problems; g) sustainability within and outside the project area, so that local people can manage the project after donors, interventionists, etc. have withdrawn. The same study found that project failure can be the result of: a) failure to influence people's perceptions; b) donor-dependency, in which people wait for donors and government to provide initiatives and the means to initiate and sustain them; c) poor project identification, in which local communities are not involved or projects are not financially viable; d) lack of capacity building of local groups; e) lack of management expertise; f) initiatives that are seen as unnecessary within the context of the intervention; and; g) failure to develop good interpersonal relationships among collaborating institutions or between interventionists and target communities.

Norman's study (2, 2012), revealed that the failure of RDPs could be attributed to: lack of funds, poor project management, poor management of funds, lack of commitment and motivation, low level of education of project members, lack of youth involvement in community-based projects, lack of monitoring and evaluation by government officials and community

leaders, lack of training and unavailability of workshops for project members and lack of government involvement in addressing project challenges were identified as the reasons for failure of community-based projects.

Some RDPs' locations are selected for narrow social, economic, or political justifications that satisfy the needs of small categories of rural people. Yet, such RDPs are neither sustainable nor articulating program ownership and self development principals among Bedouin communities. Site selection decisions could be taken by scientists, politicians, local governmental executives or/and tribal leaders or all of them. However, end beneficiaries, of such programs, who are usually poor and voiceless, have no say on these decisions.

The Study Objectives

The study problem was to investigate the objectivity or subjectivity of the criteria considered in selecting sites for implementing RDPs that might be reflected in their success or failure. The study objectives were to: a) List different criteria used for selecting RDPs' locations; b) Classify the identified criteria; and c) Suggest essential interventions for better RDPs' site selection.

Material and Methods

The descriptive study was conducted in Wadi El Brook Valley, central Sinai, North Sinai Governorate, one of the very poor and harsh regions of Egypt during January 2011 and just before the revolution. A semi-structured checklist was used for field data collection through personal interviews with 50 respondents from four RDPs-related stakeholders: 10 governmental executives; 10 beneficiaries; 10 Bedouin tribes' heads "Shikh" and local leaders; and 20 researchers and scientists. The checklist included open-ended questions to keep the flow of knowledge and information.

Results and Discussion

The study revealed that the main criteria, for site selection of RDPs, were highly subjective, based on the opinions of local political leaders, who had the say and power, whereas the needs of the majority of end beneficiaries were ignored or degraded. The used criteria, had led to widespread dissatisfaction, loss of faith, loyalty and belongingness, need to be critically reviewed and replaced with more objective criteria agreed upon by the majority of community stakeholders. For enhancing more decentralized, self-reliant and resilient local communities, the study suggested establishing stakeholders' advisory units, at different administrative levels, to stimulate and maintain community dialogue and facilitate collective decision making related to site selection of RDPs and other relevant priorities. As shown in table (1), the study also revealed the following results: a) participation of women in decision making was very weak or absent as preserved (94 % only participate); b) Researchers and politicians are the most important decision takers of RDPs' location (as reported by 68% and 38% of the respondents); c) appropriate selection of RDPs' location contribute to project success (64% and 28% strongly agree and agree successively).

Table (1) Distribution of the respondents according to the studied factors (N=50)

Factors	No.	%
Sample distribution:		
Researchers and scientists	20	40
Governmental executives	10	20
Bedouin tribes' heads and local leaders	10	20
Beneficiaries	10	20
Respondents' opinion concerning women participation in RDPs' location selection:		
Women strongly participate	2	4
Women weekly participate	1	2
Women do not participate	47	94
Respondents' opinion concerning decision takers of RDPs' location:		
Researchers and scientists	34	68
Politicians	17	34
Bedouin tribes' heads and local leaders	12	24
Beneficiaries (Bedouins)	0	0
Good selection of RDPs location contribute to project success:		
Strongly agree	32	64
Agree	14	28
Not identified (do not know)	4	8
Disagree	0	0
Strongly disagree	0	0

Source: Data was collected from the field using semi- structured check list

Conclusions and Outlook

RDPs, albeit having such major elements of strength as strong political awareness and will in addition to the availability of essential resources, might fail to achieve its objectives if their location is selected according to inappropriate criteria. Based on the results of this study, the most important criteria, for selecting RDPs' locations as addressed, are: a) the results of socio-economic and environmental studies support a specific location in order to introduce more innovative initiatives that could significantly contribute to resolving urgent local problems and satisfying community population basic needs ; b) community acceptance of the RDP, as an indicator of its demand-driven nature; and, c) cooperation and coordination among different local, regional and national partners and stakeholders that contribute to more sustainable projects through more effective planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the project. The study revealed that RDPs in the study area is gender-blind, since the participation of women was very week or absent. Therefore especial efforts and attention should be direct to enhance beneficiaries and women participation during all the stages of RDPs'.

References

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