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

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Abstract

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. Some 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 programme ownership nor self development principals among Bedouin communities. Site selection decisions could be taken by scientists, politicians, local governmental executives or 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 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. The descriptive study was conducted in Wadi El Brook, central Sinai, North Sinai Governorate, one of the very poor regions of Egypt. 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 and local leaders; and 20 researchers and scientists. The checklist included open-ended questions to keep the flow of knowledge and information. 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 and need to be critically reviewed and replaced with more objective criteria agreed upon by the majority of community stakeholders. For enhancing more decentralised, 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.

Keywords: Egypt, North Sinai, rural development programs, site selection criteria