

Farmer recommendations after 15 years of innovation

Güinope was the site of a highly acclaimed people-centred development project in the 1980s. The ACORDE / Ministry of Natural Resource / World Neighbors' Integrated Development Program (IDP) was unique for its time, since it promoted local innovation for generation of responses to needs rather than relying on technology transfer. Furthermore, it was one of the first efforts in Latin America to employ villagers as principal agents of change. Fifteen years after the inception of the IDP and ten years after its completion, the authors interviewed farmers in their fields and held a series of participatory workshops with 10 former farmer promoters (FPs), now influential farmer leaders. The results of this study were published recently in *Agriculture and Human Values* (see end). Some reflections of the FPs on rural development programmes are summarised here.

In 1982, the IDP felt that soil conservation and the development of FPs offered the greatest opportunity for community progress. Fifteen years later, FPs expressed the need for development organisations (DOs) to give attention to new priority areas. Community populations have become increasingly transitional. This has drastically changed traditional mechanisms of learning, leadership, and organisation. External cultural influences have placed new pressure on local norms and behaviour, and agricultural modernisation emphasising export-oriented and extensive agriculture is threatening the sustainability of smallholder production systems.

The FPs felt that the most effective projects were those that facilitated community participation. Projects should, they said, include men, women and youth, begin with local interests and experience, rely on available resources, and ultimately permit the community to direct change. It was also important for DOs to enable leadership and to collaborate through local leaders. They added that such leaders should be chosen based on their ability to learn, success in applying innovations, and demonstrated volunteer spirit.

Projects, they said, should not focus on single-answer solutions or technical themes, but rather embrace the local complexity. They argued that the best way to achieve this was through cultivating the "human farm": the head (ability to think), the hands (ability to implement ideas), and the heart (motivation to initiate and complete tasks). Further, they encouraged DOs to become facilitators, enabling communities to develop and implement independent initiatives by assisting them in organising, getting access to information, representation in political circles, and logistical support.

The FPs mentioned that present priority areas demanding support were marketing of commodities, irrigation, credit for investments, and attention to the development of new leaders in the community, especially women in leadership roles. They also sought conditions that would permit children to become independent farmers or entrepreneurs, rather than labourers. Such changes would demand new platforms for the community's voice in government decision-making and the formulation of policies.

Ultimately, the local leaders downplayed the role of technologies in rural development and called for special attention toward enabling communities to confront external pressure, particularly recent government "modernisation" policies they felt threatened community livelihoods.

The FPs presented their ideas to a forum of 30 representatives from 12 DOs as well as 15 farmers from the Güinope area. An open discussion followed the presentation, and the group

summarised nine essential project attributes and strategies for more effective development work (Table below).

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Essential project attributes and strategies for more effective rural development

Attributes	Strategies
1. Increasing participation	Begin with local priorities Be inclusive (include women and other disadvantaged groups) Work with local knowledge and available resources Increase involvement of local actors in decision-making and ultimately permit community control over initiatives.
2. Avoidance of paternalism	Avoid using external incentives (e.g. gifts and subsidies) to motivate Use success to inspire increasing involvement and participation
3. Integrated human development	Attend to the "Human farm" (development of knowledge, skills, and motivations) View technologies as tools and their use as means rather than ends
4. Community-oriented flexible projects	Respond, do not lead Develop projects and methodologies in collaboration with communities Grow with the changing needs, interests, and abilities of intended beneficiaries
5. Collaboration with multiple institutions	Involve the entire range of local organisations Develop abilities to work together Build linkages among multiple development organisations and coordinate efforts
6. Start small	Begin with small, manageable projects that permit people to build confidence and abilities without involving them in substantial risk
7. Quality agents of change	Employ extensionists and promoters who are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • experienced in farming • competent with agriculture, teaching, and organising • genuinely sensitive to the local situation
8. Local leadership and innovation	Enable local leadership and achieve change through leaders Chose leaders who: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have thirst and ability for learning • have successfully applied innovations on farms • demonstrate volunteer spirit Promote democratic (rather than autocratic) leadership styles Promote independent learning (experimentation, analytical skills, and self-discovery)
9. Local initiative	Encourage communities to generate projects Provide organisational support Facilitate access to information, teaching materials, and provide logistical support