

RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN THEORY AND PRACTICE: THE ROLE OF PAID-WA, BUEA, CAMEROON

PAID-WA's approach to rural development planning

Pan African Institute for Development – West Africa (PAID-WA) is one of the leading organizations in rural or community development with over 35 years of experience. Community development to PAID-WA means the outcome of a series of quantitative and qualitative changes occurring among a given rural population whose conversion effects indicate in time, a rise in the standard of living and favourable changes in the way of life of the people concerned. It does not mean isolated programmes of community development such as rural animation, mass education, agricultural extension, health and nutrition extension or of any other terms applied to sectoral programmes which are carried out in the rural area or within the rural community. It means rather a comprehensive development of the rural area.

This view is reflected in PAID-WA's diploma course that has evolved from Integrated Rural Development (IRD) to Diploma in Development Studies (DDS). As part of the DDS programme, PAID-WA conducts village studies (VS) and impact assessment studies (IAS) of projects resulting from village studies. This paper focuses on the VS carried out in December 2007 for 2007/2008 academic year.

Village Studies

Why village studies?

The village studies have dual objective; to equip participants of the DDS programme with rural development skills while at the same time help villagers identify, analyse and prioritize their problems in order to identify solutions to them.

How are village studies conducted?

The approach to village studies is participatory, using Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) methods and techniques for systematic data collection and analysis. The centrality of the information gathering is a situation assessment of a village. A village assessment, also known as the problems and solutions identification stage, provides baseline information on the socio-economic, cultural, political and environmental situation in the village.

The community assessment and planning processes build on village resources and constraints, by getting them thinking about how they can direct or improve existing situation. One of the tools of situation assessment is a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis, which takes care of influential factors both internally and externally. The goal of the analysis is to prevent people from developing a 'wish' list and encourage people to use opportunities and assets in coming up with development plans.

Suggested development plan!

One of the outputs of the VS is the formulation of a Suggested Development Plan (SDP). The SDP is prepared using a problem-oriented planning as opposed to vision-oriented planning given the difficulty of villagers to envision and articulate their future development. The problem-oriented approach builds on the assumption that villagers know their problems and can share them. But vision-oriented planning requires that villagers be exposed enough to be able to see into the future. However, care is taken in balancing the two approaches so as to prevent villagers from seeing outsiders as people bringing solutions to their problems, a situation that can fuel dependency and jeopardize ownership of development actions.

The SDPs are prepared bearing in mind national and local development policy and programmes in order to avoid duplication and waste of resources. This is typical of infrastructure projects that are very demanding financially and technically.

About communities under study!

The two villages studied for 2007/2008 academic year were Fonjumentaw and Lewoh:

i) Fonjumentaw

Fonjumentaw is situated in Alou Sub-Division, Lebialem Division of the South West region of Cameroon. It is bounded to the North by Fongo-Tongo, East by Dschang, South by Upper Bayang Sub-Division of the Manyu Division, West and North West by Fossungu, East by Ndungated and Fotabong. It is divided into two zones, Upper and Lower Fonjumentaw with distinct climatic conditions.

Based on the PRA methods and techniques, problems were identified, analyzed and prioritized as follows:

Table 1: Problems ranking for Fonjumentaw

Problem	Rank
Difficulty to transport farm produce	1 st
No access to potable water	2 nd
Difficult to access financial services at the community	3 rd
High prevalence of livestock diseases	4 th
Inadequate employment skills for youth and women	5 th
High incidence of post-harvest lost due to marketing related problems	6 th

Source: PRA field work, 2007

ii) Lewoh

Lewoh is a village located in the central part of Alou Sub-division in Lebialem Division of the South West region of Cameroon. It is one of the six Fondoms that make up Alou Sub-division. Lewoh shares boundaries with Ndungated of the North West province, Upper Lebang on the North East, South East With Upper Bayang and finally with Ndundung on the East. Lewoh community is situated in a low land surrounded by high undulating hills, which make this village highly inaccessible. It has a population of approximately 14,000 of whom 60% are females and 40% males.

Table 2: Problems ranking for Lewoh

Problem	Rank
Difficulty to commute between neighbouring communities	1 st
Difficult access to financial services	2 nd
Inadequate capacity for entrepreneurship	3 rd
Poor marketing system	4 th
Poor coordination of communal activities	5 th

Source: PRA field work, 2007

Who are the stakeholders for village development planning?

In principle, socio-economic and political groups; members of village traditional council; youth, women, cultural and development associations; elites; representatives of relevant government agencies; municipal council; NGOs; and economic operators are expected to take part during village development plan. Our experience, however, shows little involvement of stakeholders outside of the village.

Village Seminar!

Having carried out a situation assessment of the village, a final meeting with the entire village and other stakeholders, especially government administrators, is necessary. This meeting takes place in a ceremony called village seminar. The PRA team members made up of insiders, supported by outsiders, jointly present the draft report to the rest of the community members. The villagers, in a question-and-answer session clear their doubts as well as make inputs into the SDPs presented before adoption and validation. Village seminars are usually lively, characterized by animation like choral music and traditional dances and in some cases, dining and wining crown the occasion.

How are village studies' reports disseminated?

Draft reports presented during village seminars are later on finalized by external facilitators (DDS participants supervised by PAID-WA's lecturers). The final reports are submitted to the communities' concerned and key stakeholders such as Divisional Officer, council officials, elite and any relevant stakeholders. The purpose of dissemination is to create awareness of the SDP emerging from the village within their jurisdiction and facilitate the participation of these stakeholders during SDPs implementation.

Way forward!

The usual practice by PAID-WA is to encourage villagers to use the SDPs to do fundraising by themselves. However, due to the digital divide between rural areas and the rest of the world, and their limited fundraising capacity, PAID-WA does assist studied communities in identifying development partners. Therefore, your kind support for the realization of the SDPs would enable the villages attain their development goals.

Prepared By:

TANGE Maurice MIH
Programme Coordinator
PAID-WA
00237 77 46 01 02 / 33 32 34 15
tange_m@yahoo.co.uk
paidwaorg@yahoo.com.hk