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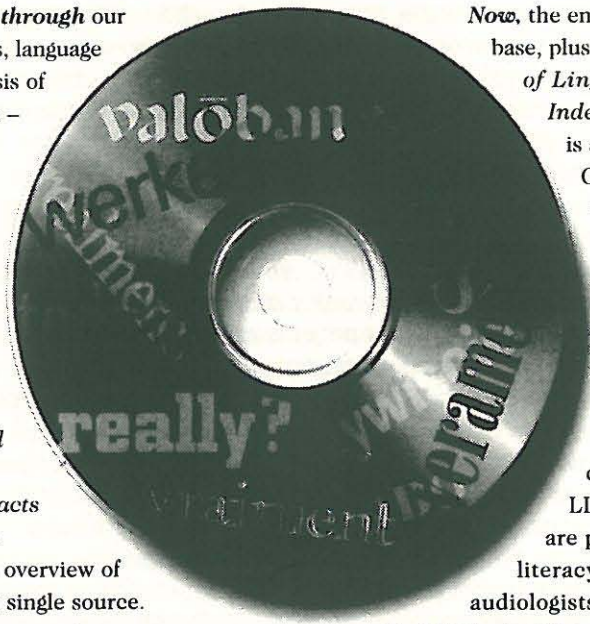
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Daniel Fino¹

The Communal Development Support Programme in Burundi: A Case Study of External Support of Local Institutions in Rural Development

In the eighties, an intensive North-South discussion concerning methods of intervention in the field of technical co-operation and their necessary reforms was initiated. This exchange influenced both the ways of thinking and the operational activities within the Graduate Institute of Development Studies (IUED).

Our team tried to systematically adapt its field work strategies to the new issues. One of the first attempts to do so occurred through the "Communal Development Support Programme". This bilateral programme between the Burundi and Swiss governments was carried out, at the Burundian side, by the Ministry of Agriculture, and by the IUED, for Switzerland.

In this reflection, we attempt to capitalize and learn from experience acquired during this co-operation programme, which lasted ten years. Institutional aspects and support strategies are emphasized as we tried to innovate in these fields during the whole period the programme was operative.

The programme became active in 1984, after a preparation period of two years; it ended in August 1993, only a few weeks before the ethnic violence of October-November 1993 began. This tragic conflict led the country, once again, into a state of social, political, and economic turmoil.

The programme had a difficult start. The initial idea of the Ministry of Agriculture was to increase fruit and vegetable production in the rural part of the province of Bujumbura in order to supply the capital market. In 1981 a team from our Institute studied this proposal in the field and discussed it with the Burundi authorities. The team came to the conclusion that, owing to erosion and insufficient land in the area, it was not possible to implement the project as planned.

A proposal was made to obtain a good appraisal of the situation and to organize an action-research project, i.e., initiate a few small actions on soil protection, seed supply, food storage, water distribution, etc. The results obtained after this first phase generally confirmed the conclusions of the identification mission. As a result, the IUED decided that the programme should promote diversity (different types of activities) and not only one

¹ The author wishes to thank Peter Uvin for his inspiration and advice.

specific agricultural activity; moreover, it should seek to strengthen local institutions for rural development.

In 1984, a proposal was made to the Ministry for a medium-term co-operation programme (3 to 5 years) between the Swiss Development Co-operation agency (SDC) and the local administrative structures of the Isale-Mubimbi area. It was based on three important points:

- 1) Development activities must build on local dynamics; they must come from problems which people are willing to solve and result in initiatives they want to promote.
- 2) External aid must be considered a supplement to the efforts and contributions of both private and public actors, to solve their problems and to achieve autonomous development. External aid must be additional to local efforts and not replace them.
- 3) The external support must be flexible and adaptable. The general co-operation agreement should not be too detailed; details should be included in the annual operational programmes. Both partners must collaborate in preparing this agreement and it is important that, while negotiating, an adequate system of programming – monitoring – evaluation be included in the agreement.

Concerning the programme content, it was proposed that external support would focus on eight main working fields, which are the main preoccupations of the people living in the region:

- 1 Food production
- 2 Reafforestation
- 3 Animal husbandry
- 4 Agro-industrial production
- 5 Handicraft industry
- 6 Infrastructure
- 7 Public health improvement
- 8 Fish farming.

Here again, the negotiation phase of the new programme between the Burundi and Swiss governments was long and painful. The Ministry of Agriculture did not agree with the proposal. It refused to change the status quo (authoritarian and vertical learning methods, priority to cash crops, i.e., coffee, disinterest in food production, etc.). Moreover, the Ministry preferred a more traditional project in which inputs and outputs are well defined in advance and priority is given to the interests of the central administration. Another handicap to the negotiations was the fact that the social-political context of Burundi at the time was unfavourable to open discussion of new strategies for development, such as the consideration of the basic needs of population and the suggestion of their greater involvement.

The IUED could not accept being part of an approach which 1) ignored the realities of population, formulated planning actions on the basis of needs felt at another level; 2) did not appeal to introduce responsibility, did not favour the participation of the local population; 3) did not take into consideration local potentials.

The Burundi authorities finally signed the agreement, but without being convinced on the contents and under pressure (they did not want to lose the Swiss funds). During the years that followed, this forced agreement was a real handicap and hindered the outcome of the programme: the Ministry has never really committed itself to the programme although its full support would have been necessary and determining.

Institutional Structure: Intentions and Realities

The following is the institutional framework of the programme.

	PUBLIC		PRIVATE
	SDC		
NORTH		IUED	consultants
	GOVERNMENT OF BURUNDI		
	MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR	MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE	farmers artisans
SOUTH	Governor	Management committee	traders
		PADC	civil servants
			etc
	Communal Administrator	Communal Technical Services	

Figure 1: Principal Actors Involved

Some explanations:

- 1) A co-operation contract was signed between the Burundi Ministry of External Affairs and the Swiss Co-operation Department.
- 2) Until 1992, there was no office of the Ministry of Agriculture in the Province of Bujumbura (Provincial Direction). The PADC had to fulfil some functions of the Provincial Direction on behalf of the Ministry. This was incompatible with the PADC's role to strengthen and reinforce local structures.

- 3) PADC's main partner was the local administration, whose role in local development was not clear (see article P. Uvin). Collaboration between PADC and the local administration has always been difficult.
- 4) Farmers were not organized. Their main problem was the lack of good soil and its degradation.
- 5) Handicraft producers were slightly better organized than farmers.

We now turn to the internal organization of the PADC project: its structure, composition and functions (see figure 2 and annex 1). We immediately observe two features: The PADC is a heavy structure with much personnel and a strong field presence. Its functions and resources are very important compared to those of other local structures, including the communes and the local agents of the Ministry of Agriculture.

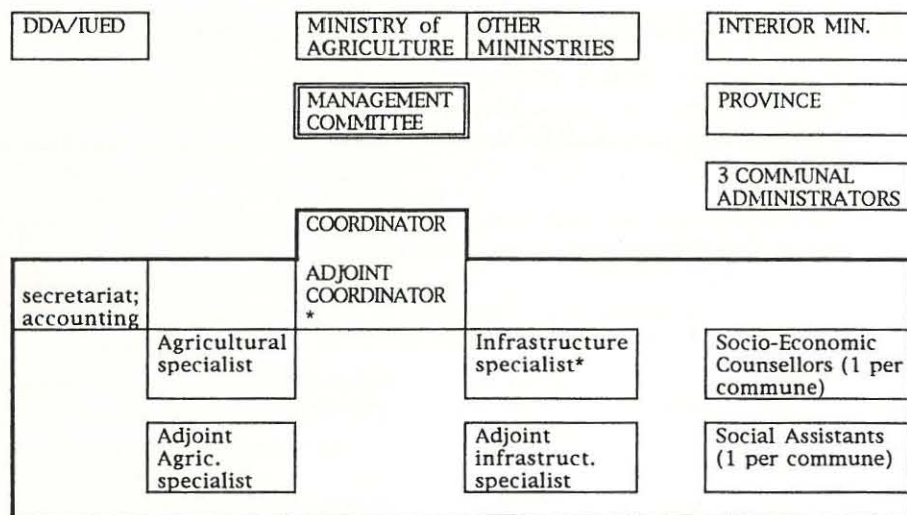


Figure 2: PADC Organigram, 1989

* expatriate technical assistants

Concerning its functions, the PADC was subject to continuous pressure to act not as an institutional support program (as outlined in figures 3 and 4) but as an ordinary classical project. In some sectors, where dynamic and motivated actors existed, the PADC managed to act as a real support project. In most sectors, however, the PADC became the central actor carrying out projects which had not been initiated by the local actors. The PADC ended up substituting local action, programming, financing, and implementing activities on its own. This question of substitution is central to the present analysis.

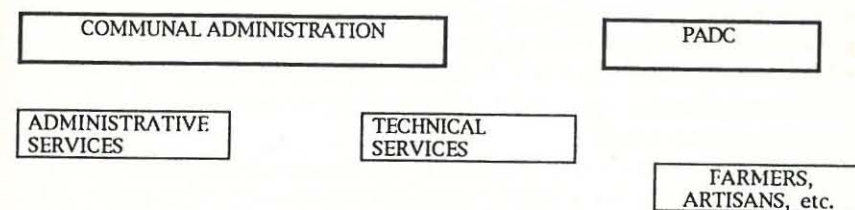


Figure 3: Planned institutional set-up

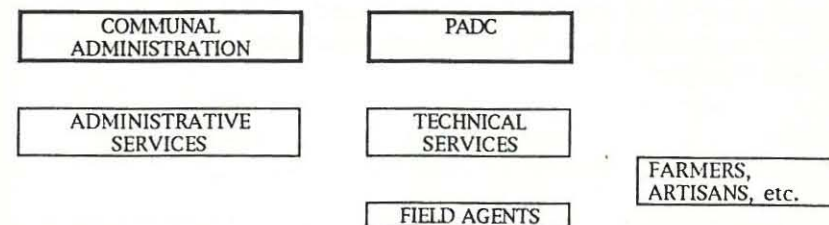


Figure 4: Actual institutional functioning

To conclude this short analysis of the actors, I wish to add that there was a considerable gap between the interests of the different actors. The only real consensus concerned soil protection; open opposition was expressed on some of the other points (see annex 2). Looking at the programme globally and with the benefit of hindsight, we must ask ourselves if there existed the bare minimum of convergence and understanding between local actors and the support programme to achieve the ambitious PADC programme.

An Overview of the Major Problems

In general, the program faced the following six major challenges:

- 1) From the beginning, the PADC was confronted with the dilemma between reinforcing, supporting local structures, and intervening directly, through an autonomous project.
- 2) The PADC found it difficult to combine contractual co-operation based on negotiation and the necessity to request the fulfilment of the other party's commitments.
- 3) The PADC was not entitled to choose its partners.
- 4) There were problems in matching the financial support to the institutions' own resources, and in covering recurrent expenses.
- 5) The PADC management was plagued by internal problems.
- 6) Problems linked to the institutional setting.

In each case, I will give one or two examples, which show the type of solution chosen and the lessons learnt from it:

- 1) From the beginning, the PADC was confronted with the dilemma between reinforcing, supporting local structures, and intervening directly through an autonomous project.

Difficulties encountered

The PADC was under pressure from both *natives' associations*, and *political authorities*, who demanded visible results such as roads. This led the PADC to intervene even when actions were not supported by the local actors. There existed a contradiction of interests between visible "hardware" like buildings, and invisible "software", like training, creation of management tools, increase in participation, etc.

Solutions tried

– information of the population and awareness "campaigns", by means of lectures, visits, video reports, etc.
– training support to the PADC team to better understand the PADC approach and resist outside pressures.

Lessons learnt

From the very beginning it is very important to resist the temptation of *substitution*. Once it has taken place, it is extremely difficult to return to a support strategy. Except in emergency cases, one must avoid intervening in lieu of the local actors.
The large financial capacities of PADC certainly created an incentive to intervention.

- 2) The PADC found it difficult to combine contractual co-operation based on negotiation and the necessity to request the fulfilment of the other party's commitments.

Difficulties encountered

PADC managers were unable to enforce respect of the decisions taken by the Management Committee. There were no sanctions in case of non-respect of decisions by administrators and technical services.

Solution tried

In order to show the responsibilities of each partner and to clear up a certain number of points, several agreements were signed between the local administration and the head of PADC (some were also signed by the provincial authorities).

Lessons learnt

Even though it may be difficult, it is important to stop co-operating in cases of repeated non-respect of agreements, contracts, etc. This helps to stop the automatic provision, year after year, of project funds even if agreements are not respected. PADC's main error was to continue intervening although the local Partner was not committed.

- 3) The PADC was not entitled to choose its partners.

Difficulties encountered

Partners were selected without checking if they were willing to co-operate in an institutional support approach. The PADC's strategy involved working with partners who had (or wanted to have) a programme with priorities; had some power, legitimacy and a will to commit themselves to social change. With a few exceptions, these criteria were absent in the case of PADC partners.

Solutions tried

The PADC organized a great number of training sessions, trying to convince its Partners of the advantages of the PADC strategy.

Lessons learnt

Before starting co-operating with a strategy of institutional support, some minimum conditions have to be fulfilled:
– Securing that there is a will of the partners to work for development objectives;
– maintaining positions in favour of local inhabitants;
– working according to a programme;
– agreeing to transparent relations.

4) There were problems in matching the financial support to the institutions' own resources and in covering recurrent expenses.

Difficulties encountered

Annual negotiation and planning of supports with local administrations were never possible. They did not agree with transparent communication, neither in discussing the budget, nor in elaborating a consolidated planning. PADC contributions were considered compulsory dues. The financial inputs of the PADC significantly certainly helped solve problems in the area. Yet, two questions remain: did they match local resources? did they match the available management capacities?

Solutions tried

Precise proposals were made several times towards a consolidated communal planification, which would include local budget, external subsidies, community participation, and so on. Attempts were made to create opportunities for local administration to participate in the PADC programming. The results were not conclusive.

Lessons learnt

The partners should agree to analyze together their global financial situation:

- their own financial capacities,
- alternative sources of subventions,
- structure of expenditures,
- definition of support needs.

Clear procedures should exist to make this happen.

5) The PADC management was plagued by internal problems.

Difficulties encountered

From the beginning onwards, the PADC lacked a strong management system. Team relations were mainly based on confidence. As a result, the PADC structure was not organized strongly enough to prevent and control cases of confidence misuses and malversations. The team of PADC was too big for the role they had to fulfil; thus, the structure was difficult to manage and to control.

Solutions tried

PADC regulations were improved. Management tools were introduced.

Lessons learnt

The regulations and internal management procedures should have been introduced, and applied, from the very beginning, especially in a situation like that of Burundi, where ethnic tensions are permanent.

6) Problems linked to the institutional setting.

Difficulties encountered

The composition of the Management Committee created two main problems:

- a) The membership of the administrators (leading to a confusion between decision making and executive positions)
- b) the absence of representatives of civil society.

The Management Committee did not assume its responsibilities of monitoring, control and imposing sanctions.

Solutions tried

All the problems were always discussed openly during the meetings of the Management Committee. Unfortunately, these exchanges were rarely followed by decisions, and even less implementations.

Lessons learnt

The executive team must be acting independently, under clear terms of reference, and report to the Management Committee. The latter does not include all the actors, but only one or two representatives of both sides.

Some elements of conclusion

In a strained social and political situation it is difficult, almost impossible, to introduce a real strategy of institutional support. If transparency and will to change are lacking, the operational and technical partner institutions are very often paralysed. There often is no real possibility to freely choose partners. The choice of partners becomes then very politicized, especially in a situation like that of Burundi, where any local institution engaged in a social transformation is considered a danger by the official system.

PADC experience shows clearly that some basic conditions have to be present if an institutional support programme is to work:

- The main actors have to agree on the approach.
- The systems of negotiation, contracts, respect of the engagements, participation, evaluation have to be agreed upon.
- The will to work towards public interest and to be open to a public discussion about development priorities, utilization of resources, distribution of responsibilities must exist.

PADC experience shows also that training has a limited impact, if these basic conditions are not present. It is the same in the field of introducing regulations, procedures, organizational reforms, new concertation structures, etc. Their usefulness is limited, because of deeper problems undermining them – such as a lack of understanding about development options and differences of interest.

Furthermore, PADC experience showed that the complexity and size of the support structure created difficulties. It was difficult, in the frame of this programme, to practice good management and control, to remain flexible and adaptable towards new situations, to end or to start relations with partners, if necessary. The bigger the structure, the less easy it is to function as a real support to local structures, reorienting activities and even stopping them, if needed.

Many efforts have been made, in 1992 and 1993, to learn from the lessons of the past and to reorient activities. The process was well advanced and the socio-political context was more and more favourable (democratic opening 1990 – 1993). Unluckily, one month before completion of the proposal of a new co-operation programme (which was to support mainly private self-help initiatives), resurgent violence brought about a brutal end to the process.

Abstracts

Dieser Artikel konzentriert sich auf die institutionellen Aspekte und die Unterstützungsstrategien, die ein Hilfeprojekt in Burundi verfolgte. Das Projekt gründete auf einer Vereinbarung in drei Hauptpunkten zwischen dem Geber und der Regierung: Erstens müssen die Entwicklungsaktivitäten auf lokalen Vorgängen aufbauen; zweitens war die Hälfte als Ergänzung für die Anstrengungen der öffentlichen und privaten Akteure anzusehen; und drittens muß die Unterstützung von außen flexibel gestaltet und anpassungsfähig sein. Diese Konzeption führte zu einer Reihe von Problemen für das Projekt in Bezug auf den institutionellen Rahmen und die Unterstützungsorganisation einerseits und dem Bemühen, die Projektziele zu erreichen andererseits. Einige Lehren konnten aus diesen Erfahrungen gezogen werden. Die wichtigste betraf die Versuchung zu vermeiden, daß Aktivitäten der lokalen Akteure durch solche des Projekts ersetzt werden. Eine andere bezog sich auf den Abbruch der Zusammenarbeit, wenn Vereinbarungen wiederholt nicht eingehalten werden. Schließlich zeigte sich, daß eine Unterstützungsstrategie nur dann Aussicht auf Erfolg hat, wenn bestimmte minimale Bedingungen gegeben sind und die Partner sich von Anfang an darauf geeinigt haben, die finanzielle Gesamtsituation gemeinsam zu kontrollieren. Als weitere notwendige Bedingung erwies sich die Vereinbarung eines Systems der Verhandlungen, der Verträge, die Einhaltung der Verträge, der Entscheidungsteilnahme und der Bewertung. Schließlich gehörte dazu noch der Wille zur öffentlichen Diskussion der Prioritäten, der Verwendung der Ressourcen und der Aufteilung der Verantwortlichkeit.

Institutional aspects and support strategies followed by an aid project in Burundi constitute the focus of this article. The project was based on an agreement between donor and government consisting of three main points. First, development activities must build upon local dynamics; second, external aid must be considered supplementary to the efforts of both private and public actors; third, external support must be flexible and adaptable. This led to a number of major problems confronting the project with respect to the institutional environment and the support organization on the one hand and the attempt to fulfil the project goals. One particular lesson learnt from this experience was to resist the temptation to substitute the activities of the local actors by the project. Another lesson was to better stop co-operation when agreements are repeatedly not respected. It turned out that an institutional support strategy has only a chance to succeed if minimum conditions are met and partners should agree to analyze jointly their global financial situation. Another necessary precondition turned out to be the agreement on the system of negotiations, contracts, respect of agreements, participation, and evaluation. In addition, the will to discuss publicly development priorities, utilization of resources, and distribution of responsibilities had to exist.

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Annex

	PADC	Manag. committee	Ministry Agriculture	IUED	Communal admin.	com. tech services	peasant groups
preparation of the communal support programme	+++				+	+	
preparation of the farmers' support programme	+++						+
approval of the annual budget		+++		++			
execution	+++				+	+	+
organisation of the work	+++					+	+
monitoring		0		+	0	+	
supervision	++		+	+++			
conflict regulation			++	+++			
internal evaluation	+++			++	0	0	
accounting	+++						
approval of accounts		+++		++			
preparation of new phases	+++			++			

+++ very active
 ++ active
 + involved (slightly active)
 0 overtly opposed
 no sign indifferent

Annex 1: Table of actors and functions

	Minist ry of Agric.	Commun e admin.	PADC	commu netech n. serv.	farmers	artisans	natives assoc.	IUED/ DDA
increase volume of Swiss aid	++							
visible infrastructure	++	++					+	
management of public resources		0	+					++
maintenance of public order and security	++	++		+				
introduction of participatory approaches	0	0	+		+	+	0	++
strengthening of local private institutions		0	+		+	+	0	++
increase cash crop production	++	++	+	++	+			
fight against erosion	++	++	++	+	++			++
diversification and improvement of food crops			++	+	++			++
improvements in input quality and supply (seeds, tools, credit,...)	+		++	+	++	++		
commercialisation	+		+		++	++		

+++ very active
 ++ active
 + involved (slightly active)
 0 overtly opposed
 no sign indifferent

Annex 2: Table of actors and interests