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IMPACT OF THE KOSI HILL AREA RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME, NEPAL

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The Project

The Kosi Hill Area Rural Development Programme (KHARDEP) was designed to promote economic development in an area where the majority of the population (80%) are small farmers with a standard of living at or below the national subsistence level and could be considered as poor in absolute terms. Phase I of ODA's involvement began in 1976 with a series of baseline studies. From 1979 to 1986 a total of £5.9m was been spent under Phase II which consisted of a number of sectoral projects - including agricultural extension, livestock, irrigation, health and education.

The main objective was to "strengthen local services, build up local institutions and promote balanced economic and social development" through deliberate efforts to identify district needs and to focus on poorer social groups.

The Evaluation

This preliminary evaluation was by two consultants from the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine who carried out a UK desk study of the detailed impact surveys. The study provides useful evidence of the impact of rural development programmes on poorer social groups.

Overall Conclusions

It is too early to judge the success or failure of KHARDEP but evidence to date (taking into account the poor harvest of 1982) indicates that it has been at least partly successful. Evidence suggests that if external agencies continue to support the development of district-level institutions and infrastructure, their activities will have a significant impact on the well-being of a large proportion of households in the area.

The Main Findings

- The performance of the sectoral projects varied greatly. The livestock, forestry and communications projects were reasonably well managed and broadly met their objectives. The potential of others, such as irrigation, was limited by institutional problems and the weak links between KHARDEP staff and district-level government officers. There were also problems with establishing and filling posts and obtaining recurrent costs.

- Amongst sample households there was evidence of increased uptake of improved maize seed and fertiliser; greater use of agricultural extension services; increases of between 20-50% in maize production and increased wheat and potato production. Less poor households with above average land holdings benefited most from such improvements, although increased use of inputs was also observed amongst poorer households.
- Despite increased agricultural production most households still had inadequate food supplies for between 1-4 months of the year and there was little evidence of any improvement over the programme period. Many poorer households had to borrow food or cash to meet their requirements.
- There was some evidence of increased livestock holdings due to improved access to veterinary services. Animal husbandry had become increasingly attractive and important as an economic activity. There was, however, an observed increase in the proportion of poorer households not keeping oxen.
- KHARDEP-funded development projects created important opportunities for off-farm work. Over a third of sampled households had regular paid employment and poorer households were particularly dependent on access to such work.
- An increase in the number of children (notably girls from less poor households) attending school should lead to improved literacy rates.
- Despite the improvements, the overall nutritional status of adults and children had not changed. The proportion of children who were short for their age increased during the programme period, mostly amongst children from poorer households, and probably as a result of the poor 1982 harvest.

Lessons

- The very poorest households benefited but not as much as other poor households. More effective aid to the poorest requires increased effort to identify and analyse their difficulties and to design activities which take into account the complexity of the social and economic stresses they face and the strategies they adopt.
- During implementation, programme managers need highly selective information that can be readily analysed about the way the poorest households cope with stress and how their strategies change. Continuous reassessment and revision of programme objectives and activities is necessary if the initial poverty focus is to be maintained. Such an approach could have made KHARDEP more successful.
- Poverty focused programmes should be designed to help local institutions (government and non-government) to monitor the position of poorer households and ensure that reliable and affordable services meet their needs. Strengthening institutions is not easy and enlightened management at district level is a key requirement.