



13th WEDC Conference

*Rural development in Africa
Malawi: 1987*

DISCUSSION GROUP REPORT

Financing and management of rural development

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The concept of the Appropriate Approach in the formulation of development programmes was discussed. Adoption of the Appropriate Approach requires engineers to face squarely the moral, social and political context in which investment programmes are activated. Only when these issues are taken into account could a project be considered properly defined. Discussion centred on the implications of this concept for:

- (i) The consultant engineer who has traditionally seen his role more narrowly defined in technical and financial terms.
- (ii) The commercial responsibilities of consultancy firms balanced against their social responsibilities recognising their need to survive in a competitive environment.
- (iii) Finally, an account of the role and contribution of the South African Development Bank in infrastructure provision was recounted. Details were given of their attempts to define programmes in terms of the peoples needs.

The group's second line of discussion involved the personal national experiences of delegates in the area of rural water supply. Specifically, we addressed the issues of:

- (i) Who should be responsible for framing the terms of reference of National Water Plans and lower level projects?
- (ii) The respective responsibilities of donors, recipient governments, consultants and the recipient communities. In this connection the idea of sustainability of investment, locally and nationally, was emphasised.

Our group recommended a clearer definition of these responsibilities so that terms of reference might avoid confusion and ambiguity. An important aspect of this issue is that responsibility and the source of finance for on-going of maintenance should be delineated.

The final area of discussion focussed on the desirability, practicability and purpose of charges for water supplies. The group found a consensus on the following points:

- (i) Charges should be designed to enable the local community to carry out routine maintenance. Exceptional, major maintenance should remain the responsibility of the government.
- (ii) Charges should encourage the economic use of water whilst not reducing consumption below basic needs levels.
- (iii) Charges should be at levels bearable by the community taking account of low income levels. Phased charges rising as the benefits and income generation of improved water supplies were realised received attention.
- (iv) Charges had a role in fostering local pride in facilities and discouraged vandalism.
- (v) The group recognised the need for education informing the people of the benefits of potable water. This would encourage a greater willingness to pay and would discourage resort to polluted supplies.
- (vi) Agreement was reached that the ultimate aim was village or local self-reliance.

Finally, the group considered that village people should be made aware that traditional, polluted sources were not costless. The price they paid was in fatigue from carrying water, lost output because of time spent in carrying water, lost income opportunities in promoting village crafts and industry and not least, the cost of poor health and too frequently premature death.