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**People's Participation
Project in Rushinga
District, Mashonaland
Central: A Mid-Term
Evaluation Report**

17

E.M. Jassat
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P.O. Box 880 HARARE

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CONSULTANCY REPORT SERIES

Number 17

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RUSHINGA DISTRICT, MASHONALAND CENTRAL:
A MID-TERM EVALUATION REPORT**

by

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ZIMBABWE INSTITUTE OF DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

HARARE, 1990

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P.O. Box 880

Harare

Zimbabwe

First published in 1990

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Printed and published in Zimbabwe

This Consultancy Report was prepared on assignment for the Ministry of Community and Co-operative Development and Women's Affairs (Zimbabwe) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

The views and opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and should not be interpreted as reflecting the views of the Zimbabwe Institute of Development Studies.

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PREAMBLE

Generally, what has come to be known as "Another Development" has been viewed as a new model being advanced as an alternative to prevalent development models. It encourages mass, participative democratic activity in development.

The People's Participation Project for the Promotion of Self-Help Organizations in Community Development in the Rushinga District of Mashonaland Central Province was, according to its design, contextualized under the model of "Another Development".

This Mid-Term Evaluation Report for the Ministry of Community and Cooperative Development and Women's Affairs discusses the People's Participation Project model, comments upon the project design and its execution and analyses the socio-economic activities under the self-help organization's project for community development. Recommendations following from the mid-term evaluation are listed at the end of the report.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors, wish to acknowledge the support and assistance received from the Ministry of Community and Cooperative Development and Women's Affairs and the provincial and district administrations of Mashonaland Central Province and Rushinga District, respectively, in the course of preparing this Report.

We would also like to extend our appreciation and gratitude to the National Project Coordinator, the project group promoters and the "povo" (people) of Rushinga District who have in so many ways assisted and contributed to the success of this study.

PART I
**PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION PROJECT MODEL: AN
OVERVIEW**

INTRODUCTION

Following the World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (WCARRD) held in Rome in 1979 and the successes of the Rural Organizations Action Programme (ROAP) and the Small Farmer Development Programme (SEDPO) in Nepal in Asia, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, in conjunction with the Ministry of Community and Cooperative Development and Women's Affairs, initiated the People's Participation in Community Development through the Promotion of Self-Help Organizations (PPP) project in Zimbabwe. This is an FAO-sponsored pilot project. A major objective of the project is to focus on groups of the rural poor by organizing them to participate in rural development to improve their lives and achieve self-reliance.

Rushinga District in Mashonaland Central Province was chosen as the project area. The district provides a balance between a poor area, which has hitherto been neglected and an area with good road connections with Harare that permit the access necessary for a pilot project to fulfil its demonstration function.¹ In January 1986 the Zimbabwe Institute of Development Studies was selected as the national consultants to carry out a series of studies pertaining to the project. These are a Baseline Study of the district which appeared in July 1986, and a mid-term evaluation of the self-help scheme.

The objective of the mid-term evaluation is to assess the self-help group project's progress towards becoming a durable, self-sufficient grassroots organization among the rural poor of Rushinga.

PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION PROCESS: ITS MEANING AND RATIONALE

What follows under this section of the report is a cursory assessment of "participatory initiatives" in the development process.

A comprehensive review and analysis of people's participation projects (PPPs) is outside the scope of this report although it is, however, still important to point out that such grassroots initiatives are beginning to gain influence in approaches to development and in social science research.

The wide range of social practices² manifested in grassroots initiatives throughout the world are not only viewed as expressions of "alternative models"³ for development but continue to give rise to what has been described as the "dialectic of micro-practice and

1 FAO Consultancy Report; *People's Participation in Community Development Through the Promotion of Self-Help Organizations: Zimbabwe*. FAO, Rome, 1985, p.11.

2 For a comprehensive analysis of PPP as well as a review of these social practices, see Oakley, Peter and Marsden, David; *Approaches to Participation in Rural Development*. ILO, Geneva, 1984. This is a study carried out at the request of a Panel on People's Participation established in 1981. See Sethi, Harsh; "Groups in a New Politics of Transformation" in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XIX. No. 7, February 18, 1984.

3 *Ibid.*

macro-thinking" among the poor who, it is claimed, remain marginalized in current development practices.

The call for grassroots initiatives in development stresses that the disadvantaged and marginalized groups in society are the "left out" of *prevailing* models of development. Consequently, the *alternative* emphasis for initiating approaches by the poor themselves is to be effected outside governmental and bureaucratic structures insofar as the latter continue to articulate conventional approaches to development.

Proponents of the People's Participation Project view of development - which include a wide range of the UN agencies, the ILO, the churches and several non-governmental organizations - have devised approaches to development in general and rural development specifically that are aimed at enhancing people's participation in development with the aim of enabling their target groups to become self-reliant economically and socially.⁴

Such approaches, for example, have emerged out of the World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (WCARRD) held in Rome in 1979 designating FAO as the agency to promote and assist People's Participation Projects in rural development.

The latter section of this report, however, contains a review of People's Participation Projects by way of compiling a "model" against which our evaluation of the People's Participation Project being co-sponsored and coordinated by FAO and the Ministry of Community and Cooperative Development and Women's Affairs in the Rushinga District of Mashonaland Central Province will be made.

"ANOTHER DEVELOPMENT"

The idea for an alternative development approach was conceived and elaborated as part of the Dag Hammarskjold Report on Development and International Cooperation⁵ in 1975 which was prepared on the occasion of the Seventh Special Assembly of the United Nations General Assembly held in that year and formulated as follows:

The crisis of development lies in the poverty of the masses of the Third World, as well as that of others whose needs, even the most basic food, habitat, health, education - are not met; it lies, in a large part of the world, in alienation, whether in misery or in affluence, of the masses, deprived of the means to understand and master their social and political environment, it lies in the growing feelings of frustration that are disturbing the industrialized societies.⁶

"Another Development" calls for a retreat from excessive dependence upon supplies of materials and food from around the world (i.e. handouts) and upon experts and bureaucrats to solve problems. Instead, it calls for smaller-scale and self-reliant forms

4 Oakley and Marsden, *op. cit.*, claim that a wide range of international organizations have responded to the rationale of PPP for development.

5 Dag Hammarskjold Foundation, 1975. "What Now? Another Development", *Development Dialogue*, No. 1/2.

6 *Ibid.*

of social organization and ways of living. The key to this is seen in a new consciousness about those aspects of our socio-economic system that are wreaking environmental and human destruction.⁷

Seeing the world as "only one earth", the plea is for a more holistic and globally integrated approach to development which means:

Development of every man and woman - of the whole man and woman - and not just the growth of things, which are merely means. Development geared to the satisfaction of needs beginning with the needs of the poor who constitute the world's majority; at the same time, development to ensure the humanization of man by the satisfaction of his needs for expression creativity, conviviality, and for deciding his own destiny.⁸

In emphasising development as a whole, that is as an integrated and interrelated action, "Another Development" stresses that meaningful development springs out of a sense of awareness of the people's own strength and resources, thus enabling them to define their political and social sovereignty by cooperating with others at the micro-level in sharing problems and aspirations.

What emerges finally is that self-reliant, endogenous and socially just development must avoid the slavish and imitative adoption of development policies, programmes and models of the rich, industrialized countries and in particular those based on exploitation. An implication of this view is that conventional development strategies have failed to initiate an "empowering"⁹ process which through self-organization gives people the strength to create a niche for themselves and to build up material assets to support their own self-reliant development.

SELF-HELP ORGANIZATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The preceding review concentrated upon presenting some salient aspects of the meaning and rationale for self-help organizations among the rural poor. What follows is a summary of the features of these self-help organizations in the context of rural development. Such a summary is necessary as a backdrop to our evaluation and assessment of the People's Participation Project in Rushinga District, Mashonaland Central Province.

The encouragement and formation of self-help organizations in rural development is focused on small groups of the rural poor who by definition are the "poorest of the poor", so poor that they lack the means of production and very often occupy the lowest position in the rural political and socio-economic profile. This inhibits them from effective participation in rural development.

7 "Theoretical and Methodological Guidelines for Research on the *Development of Southern Africa*", *Development Southern Africa*, Vol. 4, No. 2, May 1987.

8 "Another Development", 1975:7.

9 The term "empowering", Ghai states, "refers to voluntary, spontaneous and often gradual growth of organized group activity, preceded by a process of collective reflection and characterised by active involvement of members and by self-reliance". See Ghai, Dharam, *Preface* to Oakley, P. and Marsden, D. 1984, p. vi.

The rural poor, "Another Development" claims, comprise mostly women who also tend to be the majority in the rural areas.

It is interesting to note that the notion of the "poorest of the poor" implicitly acknowledges a process of social differentiation within peasant communities. Social differentiation refers to a process of intra-group formation in agrarian relations with peasant communities being differentiated into rich, middle, poor and landless farmers, respectively.

Participation in rural development is defined as a process of involvement by the "poorest of the poor" in project design, formulation and implementation for self-reliance. The people's involvement is in the economic, social, political and cultural dimensions of development in that the model of self-help organization relies on an extended democracy and the decisions of the members.

Oakley and Marsden¹⁰ equate participation with the question of "empowering" in terms of access to and control of the resources to protect one's livelihood.

A review of the literature would indicate the following as the kinds of problems which affect the rural poor's chances of improving the bases of their livelihood:

- lack of *access* to resources for development;
- lack of viable *organizations*;
- the dominant *power* of local money-lenders and traders;
- the *dependent* and *marginalized* nature of their lives;
- the air of despondency and despair which characterises their lives.¹¹

In associating power with participation, Oakley and Marsden query whether participation is a means or an end. They note that where participation is the means to attain a particular objective, it usually entails reforms, but where used as an end, the empowering of the poor for example, it implies structural change.¹²

Self-help organizations are usually encouraged to embark upon small-scale income-generating or employment-creating activities. Likewise, external assistance is, more often than not, oriented to providing mechanisms for the delivery of needed development inputs and other services to the project beneficiaries. In this regard, a great deal of effort goes into ensuring that the self-help groups do not become entirely dependent upon external assistance and that they are able to promote internal group mobilization based upon their own resources and savings. Training for awareness, resource planning and utilization, as well as savings, are thus relevant aspects in order to enable these groups to become self-sustaining.

Overall training and orientation for the group is designed to assist the group with skills which will help them in the project's activities as well as assist the members in planning and evaluating their projects. In this respect it is also important to point out that the

10 Oakley, P. and Marsden, D. 1984. *op. cit.*

11 *Ibid.* p. 12.

12 On this aspect of participation in addition to references already cited see, for example, Cobbett, Matthew; "Community Projects: The Possibilities in South Africa" in *Development Southern Africa*, Vol. 4, No. 2, May 1987, pp. 324-333; Johnstone, B. F. and Clark, W. C. *Redesigning Rural Development* (John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1982).

training of the members is conceptualized as enabling them to pass on to others what skills they have attained. On-going training/orientation and replication constitute important functions of self-help organizations.

PROJECT DESIGN AND MANAGEMENT

The specific objectives of PPP projects are:

- To encourage the establishment of group self-help income-generating activities; and
- To encourage participatory decision-making.

This section of the report, therefore, examines two elements of the project, namely, its design and management. It focuses on one key question: To what extent have the design and management of the project been instrumental in:

- reaching the intended target group?
- achieving project objectives?

This question is answered within the broad framework of guidelines of PPP projects as well as within the context of Rushinga. To this end, this section of the report has three sub-sections: a brief reference to the design of PPP projects; a statement on perspectives to project objectives; and a critical review of how the Rushinga project has been designed and managed.

In presenting the overall design of PPP (as espoused in the literature)¹³ the following main elements are discussed:

- Reaching the poor;
- Income Generation;
- Participatory Decision-Making;
- Rationale for the Design.

Reaching the Poor

Planning of PPP projects includes two elements to ascertain that the project reaches the intended target. They are *selection of action areas* where the poor reside and recruitment of Group Promoters (GPs) who can identify the poor. PPP prescribes three criteria for determining an action area: these are level of development of the area, social stratification of the community and the presence of organized groups. A PPP action area must be a village that has been neglected and has little access to development facilities and services. A key indicator for neglect is remoteness from infrastructural facilities and services like education or medical care. The households of that village should be similar in socio-economic status and should display a low degree of social

13 See previous section of Report on People's Participation Process.

stratification. It is also important that villagers in that area lack previous experience in group organization.

The PPP argument for such criteria of group membership is that people who have previously belonged to organized groups are likely to apply their skills and experience to domineer other members and thus capture the project from the rest of the group. It is also important to keep the group small in size and homogeneous in character for purposes of solving disputes and sharing sentiments.

In PPP projects the Group Promoter is a key functionary in drawing the poor to the project. It is, therefore, important that during the preparatory phase of the project when GPs are recruited, careful consideration is given to the selection process. Group Promoters should be familiar with the conditions of the rural poor, should have working experience at grassroots level in teaching community development, non-farm income-generating activities and/or agriculture. The project plan should also cater for training programmes with a component of Methods of Social Research. During training, the GPs should apply their newly acquired skills in social research to survey potential action areas.

PPP Group Promoters are "resident", i.e. they are required to live in the action areas they serve, for only then would they be likely to adequately interact with the community and be able to correctly identify the "poorest of the poor".

Income Generation

PPP strategy in achieving the objective of "income generation" relies heavily on three interventions : *willingness* and *discipline* on the part of project beneficiaries towards *financial self-reliance*, a good network of linkages with NGOs and a mechanism for *delivery of essential services*.

The first intervention relates to material self-reliance and PPP financial policy which stipulates that in the interests of encouraging genuine self-reliance, grants in the form of handouts should not feature in PPP projects. The accepted financial proviso is that loans must be non-concessional, irrespective of the lending agency or the beneficiary. Correspondingly, the loan requires a savings deposit which in the case of PPP projects would be generated by members' own savings; and its interest rate should be the normal rate applicable to all borrowers.

PPP project beneficiaries are therefore encouraged to mobilize group savings as a first step towards providing collateral or securing a guarantee-cum-risk fund for credit facilities.

The second intervention is linkages which relate to coordination between project groups on the one hand, and coordination between groups and NGOs on the other. Such group linkages may lead to the creation of an inter-group association of the self-reliant groups. There is also a provision for a coordinating committee at national level to monitor the progress of the project.

The third intervention is the delivery/receiving system which essentially recognises the disadvantaged position of the "poorest of the poor" in terms of access to extension services, training, inputs, markets and so forth. The PPP strategy attempts to remedy this problem by, for example, directly supplying such inputs through a delivery/receiving mechanism. The mechanism is, furthermore, intended to bypass the middlemen who

traditionally act as suppliers to peasant households and so is expected to lower the costs of inputs to beneficiaries.

Participatory Decision-Making

PPP strategy to achieve the objective of participatory decision-making includes group management which is carried out by a leadership selected by the group. It also includes the coordination mechanism of the external agency and finally the Group Promoters themselves.

The role of these three agents in participatory decision-making is to facilitate local autonomy so as to enable people in groups to have a greater say in their own affairs. Furthermore, the role of the Group Promoters is particularly crucial in that by advising groups, liaising with other agencies and training group leaders in all performance skills they (GPs) would in future withdraw from the group, and the group would sustain the project by themselves.

A crucial aspect of participatory decision-making refers to internal and on-going monitoring and evaluation of the group activities by its members. This component involves participatory-oriented training to allow the members to sit down with their own leaders, i.e. the Group Promoters, and, occasionally, the external agency to evaluate the management of the projects with a view to improving such group activities.

Rationale for the Design

The main rationale for the design is that if small and homogeneous groups of poor people have access to appropriate skills training, credit facilities and a tight delivery system of inputs and services, the group will most likely increase productivity. If increased productivity reaches an "above subsistence" level, the group markets the surplus, mobilizes more savings for further credit and will, eventually, raise its economic status. The group's new economic strength would, in turn, enable its members to make decisions about things that affect them as a poor marginalized group without reference to and approval from bigger farmers or indeed the local political elite.

PART II
RESEARCH PARAMETERS AND METHODOLOGY

MAJOR THEMES CONTAINED IN THE BASELINE STUDY : JULY 1986

As a statement of affairs in Rushinga District, the Baseline Study¹⁴ had its focus derived from the FAO-sponsored pilot project in coordination with the Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs to promote and enhance participation in development by helping small groups of the rural poor initiate self-sustaining economic activities.

The study outlined and highlighted the following aspects:

- Past neglect by the State is the root cause of problems in the district. The past regimes only developed the district insofar as such development sustained their war effort. For example, they emphasised road construction at the expense of other essential infrastructure. Apart from losses of cattle and property incurred by the local people, the war had a further distortionary impact on settlement patterns as the people moved from the north to the south-western parts of the district.
- The greater part of the population is concentrated in the western enclave, with the rest of the population scattered into small, isolated homesteads in the north and eastern parts of the district. Consequently, there is "uneven development" in the district, with overall differentiation of the peasantry between East and West, the West being relatively well-off; the East facing acute food security problems and the West enduring considerable land pressure.
- The study revealed that 54 percent of the district's population are women. It also observed that women tend to bear the burden of agricultural production largely because of the phenomenon of absentee male labour brought about by the labour migration network. The household data from the survey sample revealed that over a third of the 90 households were headed by female. All this would serve to support the argument that women are the backbone of rural society, more so in Rushinga District.
- Agriculture is the main activity in the district. Because most of the district falls under Natural Region 5, it has poor soils and is vulnerable to drought. Because of poor land quality and harsh climatic conditions, fertilizers and other agricultural inputs, together with water resources and proper farming methods, become necessary. The study observed that the district lacks an adequate water supply infrastructure as it relies on seasonal streams and heavily silted and rapidly drying up small dams.
- Maize is the staple diet in the district and its cultivation is important in solving food security problems. However, the maize cultivation pattern tends to reinforce the East/West dichotomy as most of it is grown in the West, but not

14 Jassat, E. M. and Chakaodza, B.; *Socio-Economic Baseline Study: Rushinga District*, ZIDS Consultancy Report, July 1986.

in the East where climatic conditions are more adverse. The cultivation of small grains, especially the drought-tolerant varieties such as mhunga and millet, is almost exclusively confined to the East, where cultivation is largely for domestic consumption.

- Cotton is the most important cash crop in the district, although most of it is grown in the western sub-areas of the district. The study observed that both maize and cotton are grown on a small scale. The growing of vegetables in the district is insignificant because of water shortages.
- Regarding agriculture as a whole, relatively "large-scale" agricultural production tends to be confined to the West. Poor climate, rugged terrain, absence of draught power, water sources and markets are some of the elements inhibiting agricultural production in the East. The main problems curtailing agricultural productivity in the district were found to be:
 - Lack of cattle . It was "conservatively" estimated that 69 percent of all farmers do not have any cattle and 21 percent have up to only five cattle. The district's cattle distribution pattern is suggestive of the social differentiation amongst peasant producers and of uneven East/West development in general within the district.
 - Due to lack of cattle and finance to hire tractors and ploughs, the majority of the farmers rely on hoe-cultivation. This means that little land is under cultivation, resulting in low agricultural output and food production, especially in the East. Consequently, very few peasants cultivate their lands grow cash crops such as cotton and maize which require deep cultivation.
 - Because of widespread poverty in the district, most farmers do not have durable (capital) goods and cannot afford fertilizers, seeds, pesticides or other inputs.
 - The district is poorly developed with respect to water resources, infrastructure, supporting systems for technical services and other agricultural outlets. For the little marketable surplus, the marketing outlets are inaccessible to the producer as the CMB and GMB depots are too far, resulting in transport problems and high (inhibiting) transport costs.
- The new local authority structures (VIDCOs, WADCOs etc) are commendable in the sense that they are intended to enhance and facilitate Government's development thrust and to allow people at grassroots level to begin to participate in decision-making, policy formulation and planning, but the extent to which this was happening in practice left a lot to be desired. This was borne out by the fact that almost 80 percent of all respondents in the Baseline Study felt that VIDCOs had done nothing to improve their lives and quite a number said leaders of the community happened to be those who "have" and they failed to represent the interests and needs of the poor.
- Community-based group projects were undertaken by the then Ministries of Community Development and Women's Affairs and Youth, Sport and Culture. These included adult literacy, pre-schools, women and youth groups involved in income-generating schemes in poultry, brick-making, building, pottery, sewing, bread-baking, soap-making, vegetable gardening, savings clubs, etc. Lack of water affected agro-based activities, while problems of capital, inputs,

transport costs, markets, etc, hampered progress in others. The vast majority of the people, because of their poverty, could not afford joining fees to participate in the various group activities.

- Some of the suggested solutions were the provision of loans, especially for agricultural inputs and cattle acquisition, and a combination of medium-sized dam construction and borehole sinking, to significantly alleviate problems associated with peasant production in the district.

It was anticipated that the Baseline Study would assist and influence the implementation of the People's Participation Project in Community Development Through the Promotion of Self-Help Organizations in line with its (PPP project) stated objectives, especially:

- Identification of action areas and group activities;
- Identification of the "poorest of the poor";
- Raising the standard of living of the poor through people's participation in income-generating activities;
- Role of women in agriculture;
- Self-reliance and self-sufficiency in food production.

The extent to which this was done is the subject matter of subsequent sections of this report on the mid-term evaluation of the FAO-sponsored pilot project. This is especially so for the concept of the "poorest of the poor", for example.

THE "POOREST OF THE POOR" : A PROBLEM OF DEFINITION

There are limitations in trying to define the concept of the "poorest of the poor". For example, the dictionary defines being poor as "having little money; not having and not able to get the necessities of life". But, for our purposes, this definition presents a number of problems.

- It assumes a monetised environment in which money is a key element. Further, how little is "little money", and what happens if somebody has no money?
- It is static and does not give any time scale. "Having little money" and "not having the necessities of life" can be a very temporary or long-term condition.
- It does not explain what "the necessities of life" are, and *when* something becomes a necessary of life.

One of the FAO PPP project documents, on the other hand, defines the rural poor as: those individuals living at or below the subsistence level, such as smallholders, tenants, small fishermen, artisans, tribal minorities - including men, women and children.¹⁵

This definition is also questionable on the following grounds:

15 FAO Document BVH/JR/dm on *People's Participation Programme*, p. 2.

- It is not specific and is open to varying interpretations;
- The definition assumes that rural smallholders, tenants, small fishermen, artisans, etc, live at or below the subsistence level;
- Moreover, it does not explain what the "subsistence level" is and, similarly, fails to acknowledge the element of subjectivity in defining subsistence;
- While the definition largely concerns itself with specific examples of who *may* be designated the rural poor, it, however, does not give any variables or indicators which make them so.

In dealing with the "Shock of Underdevelopment", Goulet (1978) explains that:

This unique culture shock comes to one as he is initiated to the emotions which prevail in the "culture of poverty" ... (and that) the prevalent emotion of underdevelopment is a sense of personal and societal impotence in the face of disease and death, of confusion and ignorance as one gropes to understand change, of servility toward men whose decisions govern the course of events, of hopelessness before hunger and natural catastrophe.¹⁶

Descriptive definitions of the poor can be very subjective and misleading, making their proper identification very difficult.

The designation of the other person as "poor" simply because he/she has fewer material possessions, lacks certain skills, has little money, is a smallholder, lives at or below subsistence level, is "marginalized" and/or lacks "access to infrastructure", etc, should be (and is often) questioned. Again, Goulet's observation here is pertinent:

It is discomfoting for a sophisticated technical expert from a rich country to learn that men who live on the margin of subsistence and daily flirt with death and insecurity are sometimes capable of greater happiness, wisdom and human communion than he is, notwithstanding his knowledge, wealth and technical superiority.¹⁷

The discussion acknowledges that the definition, and therefore identification, of "the poor" is not an easy task. The problem becomes even more complex when it comes to the "poorest of the poor".

Maybe, then, it is the "miserable" rural poor who become the "poorest of the poor" and constitute the target population of the FAO project!

However, following from the Baseline Study, our attempt at identifying the poor as a target of the project used the following indicators : age, marital status, education, employment, remittances, cattle ownership, cultivated acreage, community position, etc.

The rural poor are often geographically, socially and culturally isolated. They commonly lack the productive assets other than their labour-power, which would enable them to struggle for self-reliance. They remain attached in dependent ways to those who have control over land and capital.

16 Goulet, D. *The Cruel Choice: A New Concept in the Theory of Development*. Centre for the Study of Development and Social Change, Cambridge, Massachusetts. (New York, Atheneum, 1978) p. 23.

17 *Ibid.* p. 27.

The discussion on distinctions amongst peasant households in the baseline survey revealed that out of the sample of 90 homesteads, almost half were cultivating less than five acres of land. It also showed that 56 percent of the sample were not involved in cotton production and that only 12 percent owned any cattle.¹⁸ The report also drew attention to the correlation of ownership of cattle (draught power), cash crop production (mainly cotton), access to credit and the cultivation of large tracts of land. The single most important variable (or indicator) for assessing distinctions amongst peasant households in the baseline report was acreage (or landholding size).

The baseline report did, however, make an attempt at identifying the poor in Rushinga District by drawing distinctions amongst peasant households on the basis of production and distribution patterns from its sample. The report in its conclusion also noted that

planning and development agencies ... take cognisance of social differentiation amongst the peasant households of Rushinga District in respect of group/project formations, supporting services, etc ...¹⁹

When we talk of the "rural poor", therefore, it is impossible to conceptualize them as static, homogeneous groups which can be readily identified and moulded. They are a dynamic and fragmented population and one of the aims of isolating them is to increase their awareness of a whole series of common interests which might give them the strength and the opportunity to organize.

METHODOLOGY

In carrying out the mid-term evaluation, data was gathered by various methods:

Fieldwork and Questionnaires

A preliminary field trip to Rushinga in 1987 for the purpose of carrying out interviews and discussions with the National Project Coordinator, the District Administration officials, the District Council officials and the Group Promoters. The purpose of the preliminary visit was to obtain a comprehensive overview of the PPP project in the district. On the basis of this preliminary visit, we observed that the main group activities were organized for crop production, gardening and savings clubs plus others such as bread-baking and sewing. It was out of this trip that our sample was determined.

On the basis of the information gathered during the preliminary visit, a series of questionnaires were subsequently prepared and administered at the following levels from the end of May to the end of June 1987.

- National Project Coordinator;
- District Administration level which included the District Administrator, the District Agritex Officers, the District Community Development Officer, District Development Fund (DDF) officers.

18 Jassat, E. M. and Chakaodza, B. *op. cit.* 1986: 82-85.

19 *Ibid.* p. 87.

- District Council officials including the Council Chairman, VIDCO Chairman, Village Headman;
- Group Promoters, Group Members including Group Leaders; and
- Non-Group Members in the vicinity of the action area.

In the process of administering the questionnaires, we utilized both structured and open-ended questions. Wherever possible, prompts were also used. This was done to ensure participatory research on the part of the people being interviewed. We also held numerous informal discussions with both project staff and District Administration officials. Another method used in the process of evaluation was observations of what was happening on the ground.

Fieldwork was followed up by a third trip to Rushinga at the end of June 1987. The main intention of this trip was to carry out in-depth case studies as well as to cross-check previously collected data.

Random Sampling

We noted from the beginning that if bias in selection was to be avoided and the precision of results fairly guaranteed, a random method had to be employed. To this end, in order to ensure an even spread of the sample *vis-a-vis* group activities, it was decided to initially sample according to an area, that is the range of activities in West and East Rushinga, respectively.

The research team decided that a third of each and every group activity would be fairly representative. The sample range of group activities is given below.

Savings Clubs

As far as savings clubs were concerned, there were 33 in the district as a whole - 25 in West Rushinga and eight in the East. It was felt that an analysis of four in the East, i.e. 50 percent, and eight in the West, i.e. 33 percent, was likely to give the desired precision.

Farming Groups

As of May 1987, there were 18 farming groups set up under the project in the district, 10 in West Rushinga and eight in East Rushinga. Our sample included three such groups for the West and five for the East. Out of the three selected in the West, one group grew cotton only, another cotton, sorghum and groundnuts and the third, cotton and maize.

Out of the total of five groups that we looked at in the East, three were demonstration plots. The idea of demonstration plots was primarily to use them as a training ground for the extension of crop husbandry skills in an area which is suffering neglect and characterised by sporadic food deficits and chronic malnutrition. Because of the importance attached to demonstration plots, we visited all three. Out of the remaining two farming groups, one was a cash crop (cotton) group and the other was a food crop (maize) group.

Market Gardening

As both an income-generating activity and for making available fresh vegetables for home consumption, market gardens were still being set up. On the whole there were 10 such gardens in the district - four in West Rushinga and six in the East. However, out of the six in the East four were non-operational. In the West, only two were operational. On the basis of this information, we selected to visit two in the West and one in the East.

Bread-Baking and Sewing Groups

There were only two bread-baking groups - one in the West and the other in the East. As far as sewing groups went, only one (in the West) existed under the project.

Interviews with the groups were aimed at two executive members and two non-executive members respectively in each group. With respect to non-members, random interviews were carried out "on the spot". All in all, a total of 74 members and 27 non-members were interviewed. Of the latter, 12 (44 percent) were from the Eastern region of Rushinga whilst 15 (56 percent) were from the West.

Fieldwork also concentrated on interviewing members and non-members alike for each group within an action area of our sample. This was done expressly in order to draw out socio-economic distinctions within the groups themselves and between members and non-members within a given area.

The respondents' profile (including that of members and non-members), agricultural and non-agricultural activity are summarised and discussed below.

The ratio of non-members interviewed is under a third (27 percent).

For both members and non-members the interviews were unequally distributed between East and West Rushinga. See Table 1 below.

Table 1
Number of Members and Non-Members Interviewed

| Members | | | Non-Members | | |
|---------|------|-------|-------------|------|-------|
| East | West | Total | East | West | Total |
| 34 | 40 | 74 | 12 | 15 | 27 |

What the figures reflect is obviously the existence of more action areas and project groups in Western Rushinga. A factor influencing this has to do with easier access to accommodation facilities for Group Promoters in this part of the district.

Non-members comprised about a third of the total members interviewed. For both members and non-members the interview sample was almost equally distributed between East and West Rushinga.

Methodological Shortcomings

The main methodological problems were two-fold. Firstly, we did not carry out a pilot survey to pre-test the instruments for data collection. This was primarily due to time constraints. However, informal discussions with the target population and data collected from the preliminary survey did in a way act as a pre-test in that both the data and discussion at this stage led to themodification and adaptation of our research instruments.

The second problem was the absence of case studies and, as such, qualitative data. The research team were keen to specifically identify any differences amongst group participants as well as gauge the effects of participation - if any - upon the participants' lifestyles and well-being (since joining the project). It was hoped that in-depth case studies of group participants and non-participants would provide a greater insight into why people joined or did not join the group activities, their perception of the activities, and the extent to which their association with the project improved their socio-economic status. Unfortunately, the prevailing security situation in the district in mid-1987 made it difficult to pursue follow-up fieldwork.

Given the relatively short time in which the fieldwork was carried out, it was rather difficult to discern contradictions and conflicts within the groups. However, it should be noted that conflicts and contradictions are inherent in any group activity and it would be fundamentally useful to evaluate such aspects as these do ultimately reflect upon decision-making and other participatory mechanisms. Furthermore, the absence of internal monitoring and evaluation strategies within the groups themselves made it difficult for the team to ascertain what was happening within the groups in this regard.

PART III
MAIN REPORT: FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

INTRODUCTION

Generally, the design and conception of the project was within the participatory framework for self-help groups. These Terms of Reference were prepared by FAO who submitted the participatory model to the Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs of the Government of Zimbabwe, who would be responsible for overall project implementation.

Given the long-term objective of food sufficiency, economic self-reliance and political autonomy (empowering), particularly in respect of decision-making, FAO, as the principal external agency, conceived of short-term measures which were vital to ensuring some of these long-term objectives.

The Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs was charged with the task of project preparation, selecting the area for implementation and for initiating the participatory programme. A National Project Coordinator was appointed to the project in mid-1985. At this stage the Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs along with the National Project Coordinator began to design and initiate the project in Rushinga District.

PREPARATORY PHASE: PROJECT DESIGN, MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

The report now focuses upon what we have termed the preparatory phase of the Rushinga project. Included under this topic are project design and strategies that were adopted for project organization and support.

Soon after his appointment, the National Project Coordinator was faced with three tasks, namely to recruit and train Group Promoters and to undertake familiarization visits in the district for purposes of identifying potential action areas. Before examining these preparatory strategies it is important to mention two tendencies that were observed by the National Project Coordinator in his *Terminal Report*²⁰ as these did have a bearing upon the preparatory and implementation phase.

According to the *Terminal Report*, two tendencies emerged soon after the Group Promoters were deployed into their action areas. The Food and Agriculture Organization, it appears, expressed "an element of impatience" at the pace of the project and were particularly keen "to see the project produce results, especially in the form of number of groups established from project effort".²¹ Against this demand for quantifiable results by FAO on the one hand and by the community leadership on the

20 Munodawafa, A. C. (National Project Coordinator, People's Participation in Community Development Through the Promotion of Self-Help Organizations) GCP/ZIM/006/ITA, *Terminal Report*, January 1987, Harare.

21 *Ibid.* Section 2. Group Formation, pp. 3-6.

other hand, there was pressure for the project to spend resources on community needs and wants "as per their own priorities".²² In essence, the pace of group formation assumed a momentum which ignored vital aspects relating to the target group.

The emphasis on results of a quantifiable nature meant that project preparation and planning received less attention, not to mention the role of backstopping facilities to the project as a whole. Demands from the community leaders were equally crucial in that *ad hoc* and reactive planning mechanisms had to be introduced. Certain implications follow from this; namely, little attention was given to the training of the Group Promoters (and group leaders) so as to make a comprehensive needs assessment of the district; to understand and internalise the objectives and philosophy of the participatory programme let alone identify and screen off the "poorest of the poor" who are, to quote the *Terminal Report*, "notoriously invisible". In addition, it also appears that insufficient attention was paid in assessing the viability of project group income-generating activities.

The Rushinga project has had a loan component in its design estimated at Z\$50 000.²³ During the 1985/86 planting season a loan in kind was given to two groups which have since then, for reasons including drought, not been able to repay. Besides, there were other setbacks, including acute delivery bottlenecks due to problems associated with transport plus the high prices charged by middlemen. In March 1987, the Project Coordinator reported that the giving of loans within the Rushinga context was not an appropriate strategy for assisting the poor.²⁴

Given this background, the loan component which formed part of the original scheme was withdrawn from the project and a Revolving Fund was introduced instead.

Revolving Fund

The Project Revolving Fund was set up to assist farmers with the early purchase of inputs for their own fields as well as for the common field. The idea of the Revolving Fund was recommended to the project during the preparatory stage by the Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs in consultation with the Project Coordinator in the field. The object of the fund was to alleviate the problem of access to inputs on the part of the peasant farmers. Transport provision out of the fund constituted an important aspect of access. It was further intended that such provisions would not only enable beneficiaries to obtain agricultural inputs early but also enable them to purchase inputs such as seed and fertilizer at cheaper rates. Such practices are viewed as responses to inadequate delivery systems, the institutionalization of which would necessitate greater involvement and participation of the people in participatory programmes. Moreover, the provision of transport would cut out altogether the role of the middleman in the supply chain and along with bulk buying meant that inputs could be sold/bought more cheaply.

22 *Ibid.*

23 Personal Communication from National Project Coordinator.

24 Project Coordinator, Memo to FAO, 17th March 1987.

What now follows is a review of how the project was managed with specific attention to the recruitment and training of Group Promoters and the selection of action areas.

Group Promoters

The project, as of May 1987 (time of fieldwork), had employed seven Group Promoters. They were interviewed by the research team and data analysis focused on their socio-economic background and training. All seven GPs are female; the youngest is 21 while the oldest is 31. Four GPs are single; they have never married before. The remaining three GPs are single parents. All the seven GPs are local women and their homes are in Western Rushinga. Out of the seven GPs one, however, was assigned to her home area. She was a "control" element as the project wanted to find out whether a GP would operate better in her home area or away from home.

All the seven GPs are literate; two have a primary level, three a Junior Certificate level and two have attained 'O' level education. Three GPs have never had a job in their life and two of these had finished school a few months before recruitment, but the other four have worked before.

One used to be a part-time Home Economics Demonstrator (HED) with the Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs, one was a temporary (untrained) primary school teacher, one a shop attendant and the fourth an artisan. Altogether six of the seven GPs had experience of working at grassroots level. Despite their different social and economic backgrounds all the seven GPs said they joined the project because they could not get employment anywhere else and they wanted money to support themselves. Secondary reasons for joining the project included the need to learn about savings, love of extension work and keenness to serve in the development of their communities.

Six Group Promoters were recruited in November 1985 and were posted to their action areas in April 1986. The seventh Group Promoter, the artisan, was recruited in June 1986 to replace a former Group Promoter who had resigned. When questioned about their job stations all the Group Promoters said they did not choose their action areas. For example, one Group Promoter reported that she would have preferred working in the East of the district where the people are poorer; another said she would like to work in an area where there is a community development extension officer from the Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs, whilst four Group Promoters indicated that they would prefer placements in their home areas so that they could be with their families. The seventh Group Promoter, the "control", said that she was unhappy working in her home area as she often found it difficult to command respect from the people on account of familiarisation. In this instance, professionalism was being undermined by personal relationships in the area.

Although project records show that as of May 1987, seven Group Promoters were attached to the project, it is our observation from the field that three other people (including one man) were working on the project and were being paid from funds allocated to the project. On further investigation, it was found that the male Group Promoter was a supervisor of Volunteer Literacy Tutors (VLTs), whilst the women were Home Economics Demonstrators (HEDs).

The project had a training programme which covered orientation (project aims and principles), leadership training and savings. Six Group Promoters attended all courses.

The seventh Group Promoter, the replacement, was appointed after the orientation course.

They all reported that the savings course was useful and expressed interest in attending follow-up programmes related to savings and financial management topics. However, by and large, their understanding of project objectives and their role within the project was seen as that of mobilizers for savings groups. On being asked what they thought about the objectives of the project, all the Group Promoters cited raising the standard of living of the people as the primary objective. It is also interesting to note that all the Group Promoters reported that they trained their group leaders in savings. Occasionally, the Group Promoters did also attend courses on bread-baking and bookkeeping which were organized for group representatives.

When mobilizing groups, six Group Promoters went through the local heads of schools and village leaders. It appears, therefore, that they went through the local structures.

Preparation plans for the Rushinga project included training of Group Promoters to facilitate the effective performance of their duties. Although the training included an orientation course in project aims and philosophy, it lacked a component of Methods of Social Research. Besides, the skills they mastered were used to identify the socio-economic characteristics of the whole Rushinga population rather than those of the potential action areas.

Action Areas

The project is concentrated in seven action areas, two in Eastern Rushinga and the rest in Western Rushinga. What is clear is that the choice of action areas reflects the disparities between Eastern and Western Rushinga. Furthermore, it appears from our discussions with both the former Project Coordinator and the present incumbent that the main criterion in the selection of an action area is willingness on the part of the local community to offer a house to the resident Group Promoter. As a result, six Group Promoters, including the two in the East, have been offered accommodation by local heads of village schools and they live there.

Some of the action areas are in the prosperous farming areas of the district such as Chimanda and Gwangwawa. It is our observation that the relatively low level of development in Eastern Rushinga was not taken into account in the choice of action areas and in relation to the number of GPs assigned to the area. It appears that issues such as lack of access to infrastructural and extension support have not featured in the choice of action areas, let alone where the majority of Group Promoters should be deployed.

The data analysed below attests to our observation that the expectations laid down in the project design were not realised. The principal reason for this, in our opinion, was that the project beneficiaries expected intervention of an infrastructural nature on the one hand, whilst on the other, the project design affected intervention of delivery of services.

ANALYSIS OF GROUP ACTIVITIES

As mentioned elsewhere in the report, the fundamental objectives of the project included reaching and benefiting the rural poor through identifying their basic needs and translating them into concrete activities. It was also envisaged as an objective that such activities would subsequently lay the foundation for sustainable development in the district.

In analysing the project activities, we are keen to find out to what extent the above objectives are being realised and also to what extent the financial support or otherwise on the part of the implementing agencies is geared towards the realisation of project objectives.

The project profile reveals three major activities - savings mobilization, farming and gardening. Bread-baking and sewing, exist but on a smaller scale. As of May 1987 when this evaluation study was carried out, the three major types of activity had only just started. However, they do provide indicators as to the ability (or lack of it) of the project in assisting the rural poor to achieve self-reliance.

Savings Clubs

Group savings - a concept which was introduced towards the end of 1986 - forms the major and fundamental activity of the project. More than half of all the activities constitute savings clubs and female membership predominates (78 percent).²⁶ When the Group Promoters were deployed in their respective areas their first assignment was to mobilize and encourage members to pool their cash resources for the purpose of setting up savings clubs. This is interesting in that savings clubs to date comprise the largest type of group activities (savings only and also as related to other activities). The project conceived that savings mobilization was a first step towards building future group self-reliance and encouraging autonomy for decision-making to undertake collective production activities.

The long-term objective - in the eyes of the project management - was that at the end of the project, the groups would have been assisted in building an independent financial resource base from which to continue their own activities.

The mobilization of savings could indeed act as a vehicle to improve the economic well-being of the rural poor, particularly in the absence of access to rural credit facilities. However, the question needs to be asked about how the economic well-being of the rural poor could be realised when savings are not linked to any productive activities? The pooling together of cash resources into group savings as the project encouraged is commendable, but within the context of Rushinga District (particularly among the "poorest of the poor") there are obviously very little cash resources to pool together.

²⁶ Nationally, women account for over 90 percent of all members. Estimates for 1984 are 5 500 clubs with 140 000 membership. Radke, Detlef (et.al); *Mobilization of Personal Savings in Zimbabwe Through Financial Development*. (GDI, Berlin, 1986) pp. 47-83.

This was borne out by the small amounts of money that had been saved by the various groups - too little to be of any use in terms of buying inputs such as fertilizers, seed, etc. The average amount per group was Z\$30. About half of the savings groups had opened a savings account with Standard Chartered Bank which operates a mobile unit in the district. Prior to mobilization of group savings, training on savings and savings procedures had been carried out by the Savings Development Movement of Zimbabwe on behalf of the project.

The emphasis on savings alone - that is, not taking into account the capacity of households in the district to save - represents a flaw in the project's design and management.

The savings component of the project was also bedevilled by the voluntary nature of savings on an individual basis. The group savings element was not at all clear and the use to which the money collected was going to be put was not spelt out either. In forming groups, the GP recruited whoever expressed an interest or showed some enthusiasm. Apart from the fact that they must be mainly women, there appeared to be no other criteria for eligibility for group membership. Because of the vagueness of the criteria, the project tended to draw not the "poorest of the poor", but that segment of society which could be considered relatively better-off. Hence the discrepancies in the individual amounts saved within the context of a group.

It is important to re-emphasise our earlier observation on the manner in which savings clubs are being organized, that the project does not link savings to productivity. Such a non-linkage is further compounded by the absence of credit /loan facilities within the project. Structural changes in society do not come about by putting too much emphasis on savings in an environment which is impoverished.

That is, individual savings via their group network were not used as a foundation for investment in any productive activity. It was our impression during the fieldwork that those people who had managed to contribute to the group savings were withdrawing their money from the group account in order to supplement their basic needs: purchasing food, etc, as the 1986-1987 agricultural season was not entirely favourable. And since financing from external sources is limited, peasants still have to rely upon their own resources.

Income-Generating Activities

The other two major activities which have been encouraged throughout the district are vegetable gardens (for both group member household needs and for sale) and farming.

Agricultural Activities

GARDENS

In introducing this activity, project management took the following features into account : The problem of food security as highlighted in the Baseline Study, especially in East Rushinga where the absence of draught power and adequate water resources is acute, to say the least. Linked to this is the question of a lack of viable markets for perishables

such as poultry and vegetables. At another level, given that facilities for non-agricultural income-generating activities are limited in the district as a whole and especially difficult in Eastern Rushinga (due to a combination of factors which are largely environmental, ecological and infrastructural), the choice of market gardens as a group activity for income generation was literally dictated to them.

As of May 1987, 18 out of the 44 groups were engaged in farming and 10 in gardening. The farming groups had only worked together through one agricultural season (1986-87) which, unfortunately, was affected by drought.

Only four gardens - two in the East and two in the West - were operational. Others were at various stages of planning and implementation. Even for those that were operational, they were merely at the planting stage at the time of our visit. The major problem of the gardens was that there was no financial input whatsoever. The gardens were not fenced nor were there any watering cans or agricultural implements. Agencies such as CADEC and Agritex donated seeds. The GP's task was - like in the savings programme - simply to mobilize and promote garden projects.

The Baseline Study highlighted water as the biggest constraint in the district and without the project seriously addressing that tissue, no amount of mobilization for gardens was likely to succeed.

FARMING

Confusion also reigned in the area of farming. There were no clearly defined objectives in the group farming activities. The shortcomings associated with the Revolving Fund have been discussed elsewhere in this report and all we can reiterate here is that it was merely used to facilitate the delivery of inputs to those who could afford to buy them on a cash basis. The poor groups could not benefit from it. In any case, due to escalating transport costs, the prices of fertilizers and seeds that were delivered to project participants through the project delivery mechanism were no different from those charged by the local shops. It was also difficult to determine the actual beneficiaries as there was no coherent recording system of input sales. This, again, stems from an inherent weaknesses in the project design and implementation.

However, it would appear that those who benefited from the Revolving Fund were those growing cotton, mainly in Western Rushinga. In East Rushinga, demonstration plots were the only salient feature of the group farming activity. As discussed elsewhere in this report, the idea of the plots was to provide a training ground for crop husbandry skills in recognition of the inadequate extension services in this part of Rushinga District.

DEMONSTRATION PLOTS

The *Terminal Report*²⁷ for 1987 observes that the idea of demonstration plots was primarily to use them as focal points for the extension of crop husbandry skills to communities in Eastern Rushinga. Given that agricultural extension services are inadequate in this part of the district where it has earlier been reported that food scarcity

27 *op. cit.* p. 7.

is critical, these plots were implemented as a joint exercise between the project and Agritex personnel in the district.

The project provided the ploughing costs, seeds and fertilizers while Agritex provided the technical expertise and training of the farmers. In all, six plots had been planted in Lower Rushinga at the end of December 1986. Crops grown were maize, groundnuts, rapoko and cowpeas intercropped with maize. The sizes of these plots varied from one to three acres. Yields from these plots will be retained by group members who will have the option to consume or market the harvest. Four field days were conducted in December 1986 to train farmers in planting methods and use of fertilizers in Eastern Rushinga.²⁸

Due to the late arrival of these tractors and the ensuing drought during the 1986-87 season, very little was harvested. The social impact of the demonstration plots, it could be argued, was negligible.

THE REVOLVING FUND

The *Terminal Report* of 1987 gives the rationale for establishing the Revolving Fund as follows:

- In view of accrued inputs supply bottlenecks at Rushinga during the peak demand season the fund was to ensure timely delivery of inputs to farmers.
- In view of the high overcharges on seed and agro-chemicals by retailers in the district, the fund was meant to assist farmers obtain inputs at cheaper prices.
- In line with the long-term strategies of the project, the function of the Revolving Fund was to provide the project with a two-way learning process:
 - Provide logistic/feasibility knowledge to project management for them to assist groups towards the planned setting up of consumer organizations;
 - Provide evident benefits for the learning process of beneficiaries as to the advantages of by-passing middlemen as they would be establishing their own consumer organizations.
- To sensitise bulk suppliers as on needs and problems of peasant producers.²⁹

The operation of the Revolving Fund is similar to that of cash groups, which are loosely organized groups (consisting largely of men) and meet two or three times a year. A study on Personal Savings in Zimbabwe³⁰ points out that cash groups also meet spontaneously for the joint purchase of inputs. Savings are accumulated by the individual members of the group and are not subject to common rules. When a group makes up a bulk order for fertilizer and seed, each participating household pays for its share. Payment is made at the time of the order or at some later date before the goods are dispatched. The members of the group meet again on the day the goods are delivered to share the work of unloading the truck. The group then disperses and, in the most loosely organized cases, may not meet again until inputs are needed the following year.

28 *Ibid.* p. 7.

29 *Ibid.* p. 8.

30 Radke, Detlef (*et. al.*), *op. cit.*

In securing inputs for the beneficiaries, the Revolving Fund also performed a recycling function and thereby recouped its costs from the members who would purchase these inputs on a cash basis. In effect, it operated on a cash on delivery basis. Transport and other costs were built into the sale price of the inputs.

By October 1986 a sum of Z\$734,00 had been paid out from the fund to seed and fertilizer suppliers. According to data provided in the *Terminal Report*, between October and December the project was to recycle these funds several times as depicted in Table 2 below:

Table 2
Inputs Procured from Recycling Revolving fund³¹

| Variety of Inputs | Orders Delivered | Value of Deliveries |
|-------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| Seed Maize | 3 | 14 600,00 |
| Fertilizers | 4 | 15 080,00 |
| Cotton Seed | 2 | 370,00 |
| Pesticides | 2 | 2 300,00 |
| TOTAL | 11 | Z\$32 350,00 |

Table 3 below gives a comparative breakdown of prices.

Table 3
Total and Percentage Savings Per Unit

| Inputs | Retail Price | Project Price | Saving | Saving% |
|------------------------|--------------|---------------|--------|---------|
| 50 kg Seed Maize | \$44,50 | \$37,46 | \$7,04 | 18,8 |
| 50 kg Ammonium Nitrate | 24 | 21,30 | 3,20 | 15,0 |
| Pesticides | 98,50 | 86,50 | 12,00 | 14,0 |

However, further analysis of the data provided by the present National Project Coordinator and from our own fieldwork suggests that the better-off farmers were able to benefit from the purchase of inputs via the Revolving Fund. Those who did not have any cash were obviously excluded from the delivery system.

Maize seed apart, fertilizer and pesticides are commonly utilized in cotton production. Maize production amongst the better-off was usually for sale or purposes of accumulation (see Baseline Study). It would, therefore, appear that the beneficiaries of the fund were those farmers who grew cotton or maize for sale. To reinforce our

31 *Ibid.* p. 8.

observations, the *Terminal Report* of 1987 acknowledges that no adequate records were kept (by Group Promoters and management as a whole) with respect to fund beneficiaries. However, crude calculations suggest a total of 300 or so households in Western Rushinga and eight households in Eastern Rushinga purchased their inputs through the Revolving Fund.

Given that orders came from these groups and villagers it could be assumed that the purchases went into cash crop production. One could perhaps also advance the point that given that the Revolving Fund is one of the most important aspects in the project, the groups that were formed to gain access to the Revolving Fund facility were organized expressly in response to this assistance. In other words, the assistance formed the incentive for group formation.

The loan component which formed part of the original scheme as opposed to the Revolving Fund was not operationalized and, instead, the idea of the Revolving Fund was instituted.

ANALYSIS OF GROUP MEMBERSHIP

Out of the total of 74 group members interviewed, 43 (or 59 percent) belonged to the category of group leaders. Group leaders in this context means executive members - chairpersons, secretaries, treasurers and their deputies. Out of the sample of 43 executive members there were 13 chairpersons, 11 secretaries, 12 treasurers and seven deputies.

The decision to interview at least two executive members in each group was based upon the following objectives:

- to assess female representation in group leadership structures;
- to identify variables that may have influenced and determined the group members' choice of their executive; and
- to briefly compile a socio-economic profile of the group leaders with a view to finding out what status they may already have had within their local communities.

Female Representation

On the question of female representation, our data shows that the proportion of women in the chairpersons group stands at 54 percent (seven out of 13) as opposed to 46 percent (six out of 13) for male representation. A further analysis of the data is more revealing in that female chairpersons are distributed as follows according to the groups' activities: one in a bakery project; one in a sewing club; two in farming groups and three in savings only groups. Of the six male chairpersons, three are in garden projects, two in farming groups and one in a bakery project.

If we distribute the total percentage of women in executive posts we get 28 (or 38 percent) women in these posts. Female distribution across these posts, that is out of the total of 23 women (excluding the five deputies) in all executive posts in relation to men in similar positions, is as follows: chairperson (25 percent), secretary (29 percent) and treasurer (29 percent).

In effect, what is being suggested is that although there are more women than men in the groups, they are under-represented and that men tend to occupy executive posts in farming, gardening, and mixed-sex groups such as demonstration plots and bakery projects at the expense of women.

Age, Marital Status and Literacy Skills

Age and marital status along with literacy skills emerged as important factors in determining project members' choice of their executive. This is interesting in that apart from literacy and numeracy skills affecting the choice of group leaders, age is obviously associated with trustworthiness, good standing and experience which in sum contribute to appropriate leadership qualities, not to mention respect in the community. In this regard, the group members did rely upon endogenous factors in making their choice of leadership.

Most group leaders also held other positions in the community. For example, six were in the local party structure, not to mention others who were master farmers (and hence belonged to farmers' clubs), two who were deputy village development committee chairpersons and others who either belonged to church organisations or sat on other committees in the district. It would, therefore, appear that the better-off not only dominate the leadership of the groups but that through their skills and experience they are in a position to ultimately capture the project from the rest of the group.

Respondents' Profile

Seventy-four members of the self-help groups were randomly interviewed alongside 27 non-members who lived within the neighbourhood of the action areas in our sample.

The decision of the research team to interview members and non-members was principally to gain some insight into their socio-economic background and thereby to ascertain whether the "poorest of the poor" did predominate in the groups. Other reasons were to find out what effect, if any, the project had upon the standard of living of the people and the attitudes and responses of non-members to the project activities themselves.

The data for members and non-members was collapsed as it was difficult to discern what effect, if any, the projects had upon the standard of living of the people. We shall comment upon this observation after our presentation of the data.

The total sample, therefore, is 101, made up of 74 members plus 27 non-members. The vast majority of homesteads (72 percent) were headed by males. Less than 10 percent of all homesteads were headed by widows.

More than half of the respondents (60 percent) were middle-aged, that is between 31 and 50 years of age. If we subtract the old age category (i.e. above 50 years old), which is 15 percent, and add the young people (i.e. 20-30 years of age) to the middle age group we find that the overwhelming majority or 85 percent are in the "economically active" age bracket.

With regard to marital status the data shows that 89 percent (90 percent of members and 85 percent of non-members) from the sample were married. However, the sample did not ask whether marriages were polygamous or monogamous. An average

dependent number of about five was recorded for both members and non-members alike.

Illiteracy levels represented just under half of total respondents (49 percent) with 47 percent reporting that they had a primary level of education and 4 percent with a secondary level of education. There were relatively more illiterate people in the non-member group than among members (56 percent for non-members and 45 percent for members). Also, there were more illiterate people in the East of Rushinga (including both members as well as non-members). The opposite was almost true for the western half of the district where 32 out of a total of 52 respondents said that they had primary or secondary education. This gives a percentage literacy figure of 62 for the West.

ANALYSIS OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISTINCTIONS

Land and Cattle Ownership

Although the Baseline Study did not recommend action areas, it nevertheless drew attention to socio-economic distinctions among peasant homesteads, not to mention disparities between Eastern and Western Rushinga. In other words, the sample of 90 homesteads from the baseline report revealed that almost half of the peasants were cultivating less than two hectares of land; that 56 percent did not grow any cash crops or produce in order to accumulate and that only 12 percent owned any cattle or oxen.³² The report also pointed out correlations in socio-economic status amongst those who owned animals as draught power, cultivated large tracts of land, produced crops in order to accumulate (mostly cotton), had access to loans and occasionally hired casual labour. However, it should be noted that the process of peasant differentiation of the rural population has typically not occurred quite so clearly, obviously or completely.³³

It is interesting to note that distinctions are apparent amongst homesteads in the district. In order to assess the effect of the projects upon the standard of living of the participants one would have to ascertain the extent to which, as well as identify, the process whereby socio-economic distinctions were being reduced or a "levelling out" was occurring with respect to agricultural production. What the data suggests is that the contrary is taking place. Analysis of the beneficiaries of the Revolving Fund - which really forms the most important activity of the project for enhancing the peasants' socio-economic standing (compared to savings clubs, demonstration plots and market gardens) - reveals that in most cases, it is the better-off peasant who has stood to gain from access to inputs for production.

The research team have also approached the topic of "people's participation" with the twin objectives of arguing that on the one hand the existence of socio-economic distinctions among peasant homesteads does mean that the "poorest of the poor"

32 *op. cit.* pp. 82-85.

33 See, for example, the excellent discussion on peasant differentiation in Southern Africa by Michael Neocosmos in "The Agrarian Question in Swaziland" in Neocosmos, Michael (ed); *Social Relations in Rural Swaziland* (Social Science Research Unit, University of Swaziland, 1987).

structurally exist in the district and that, on the other, to therefore analyse whether the project has succeeded in "capturing" the "poorest of the poor" into its ranks. The data, therefore, shows that very little consideration was actually given over who should participate and who should not. In effect, this has meant that, notwithstanding the overall objectives of the project - which is to enable the "poorest of the poor" to become self-reliant and take development initiatives into their own hands by setting up autonomous political institutions - it is our view that the reverse has occurred.

The Gender Issue Revisited

One final observation needs to be made. This refers to the issue of women. As with the question of peasant differentiation (what we loosely term socio-economic distinctions) traditional analytical frameworks likewise render gender divisions invisible. With respect to the latter, this has been changing over the years as witnessed in the "Women and Development" literature. However, it needs to be stressed that central to much of this work is an assumption that women form a self-evident constituency of interests and hence an undifferentiated target for policy intervention. Standing, in a recent paper,³⁴ argues that one should look instead at the differing socio-economic conditions within which women live and not simply treat women as a homogeneous and undifferentiated social category. We make this observation because the terms of reference for the project tend to confuse women's "disadvantaged position in rural society" with that of the "poorest of the poor".

ANALYSIS OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC DATA

The data on socio-economic characteristics of rural homesteads sought to find out the number of acres under cultivation, ownership of draught animals (and other livestock), access to loans and crops produced for accumulation (cash crops).

On acreage under cultivation the data shows that the total of members and non-members who ploughed less than two hectares stood at 61 percent. The remaining 39 percent had cultivated more than two hectares and of the latter percentage (39 respondents) 10 percent (of the overall) owned four or more hectares.

On average, there was a greater cultivated acreage in the West than in the East for both members and non-members (weighted averages for members and non-members of 3,69 and 2,81 in the West, and 2,76 and 1,00 in the East, respectively). This serves to reflect cattle ownership patterns (means of production) and to show the relationship of cattle, which are particularly important for their use as draught animals, to cultivated acreages.

Based upon the assumption that four oxen or cows were needed to pull a plough, data on cattle ownership patterns reveals that 20 percent reported having less than four beasts of burden, whilst 27 percent owned four cattle or more with the vast majority (or 53 percent) having no cattle whatsoever. Using relative percentages, a greater proportion

³⁴ Hilary Standing's "Gender Relations and Social Transformation in Swaziland" in M. Neocosmos, *op. cit.* (1987) shows how it is fallacious to generalise about the position of women in Swaziland.

of non-members (30 percent) than of members (18 percent) with more than two cattle was observed. Overall, there was a severe shortage of cattle in the district. Patterns of cattle ownership, furthermore, did highlight the East-West dichotomy in that 85 percent of members and 100 percent of non-members in the East of Rushinga had no cattle, while there were similar proportions of 53 percent of members and 13 percent of non-members with no cattle in the West.

Most homesteads reported that they kept small livestock such as goats, sheep, pigs and poultry.

Given that cattle are important as draught power for cultivating the land, most peasants had to use artificial fertilizer in order to compensate for shallow ploughing. The research team wanted to find out how many peasants from the sample purchased fertilizer and other inputs such as seed, for example. Only 22 percent stated that they had not bought any agricultural inputs. In addition, those who said that they had obtained loans from the Agricultural Finance Corporation (AFC) to purchase cotton seed, fertilizer and pesticides numbered 32 percent of the total sample of 101 (including members and non-members). Of the 21 members who responded that they had been granted AFC loans, 76 percent were from the West of Rushinga District.

To return to those who said that they had purchased agricultural inputs, it is interesting to note that out of the 60 members who did so, more than half (31 respondents), or 52 percent, occupy some position in their communities. These include a master farmer, adult literacy tutor, deputy village development committee chairperson, *sabuku* (village headman), party official, members of school management committees, church organizations and, in a couple of cases, shop/bottle store owners. This is interesting insofar as it shows that influential persons within society are in relatively strong leadership positions in the project thereby negating the whole idea of "empowering" amongst the "poorest of the poor".

When asked what crops were grown, the total responses show that both use-value production (crops grown for consumption) as well as crops for accumulation (crops for sale) are the mainstay of the homesteads' economic activity. For example, 64 respondents (or 63 percent) grew cotton whilst most peasants in the West grew maize (some for sale, but mostly for home consumption) and in the East other cereals such as sorghum and millet were exclusively grown for use-value purposes. A few respondents reported that, water permitting, they grew a few vegetables to sell on the local market.

Both members and non-members were asked if they also carried out any non-agricultural economic activities which provided an additional source of income for their homesteads. Those who said "yes" include 56 out of 74 members and 19 out of 27 non-members, giving a grand total of 75 out of 101 or three-quarters of the total. If we were to break down the data for members we find that of the 56 (or 64 percent) for this group, 36 people informed us that they occasionally worked as artisans, making hoes, pottery, mats and baskets which they sold locally. Two respondents owned shops and/or bottle stores. Twelve sold vegetables, fruit, milk and peanut butter. Of the 56 members who had other sources of income, a quarter brewed traditional beer which they sold at village get-togethers. Although we were unable to corroborate beer sales with the practice of the hiring of casual labour, it is our observation that most homesteads whose members brewed beer also sold their labour-power when they worked as casual labour during the agricultural season. Twenty-eight (or half of 56 respondents) hired out their labour. Production levels and sources of income are uneven. The rural poor are unable

to produce enough maize for subsistence and are forced to sell their labour-power on the market. This is principally due to a shortage of means of production. What this also shows is that within the district there are better-off peasants who hire labour for production.

The data analysed above indicates that the composition or membership of the groups is far from homogeneous. Moreover, socio-economic distinctions between members and non-members are not dissimilar, but are relatively marked between homesteads and in relation to the East and West of Rushinga.

Variations in socio-economic indicators, however slight, in the context of a district such as Rushinga are not insignificant.

Notwithstanding conceptual and methodological problems and limitations in defining and locating the "poorest of the poor", our data does reveal some differences among the poor of Rushinga, so to speak.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion to this report summarises some of our observations which were recorded from the field, the project records, discussions that were held with district officials as well as from the numerous occasions when members of the research team interacted with the people in the action areas. The observations are made as they relate to the People's Participation Project (PPP) strategy within the framework of the project design, management and implementation.

The design of PPP projects provides for a strategy that includes a delivery system for a specific target group. The delivery system caters for, among other things, a resource input from a local financial institution and training linked to agricultural activities. The specific target is, from the point of view of PPP philosophy, the "poorest of the poor".

During the early days of project preparation an attempt was made to contact the Agricultural Finance Corporation, the local finance institution which offers credit to farmers, in order to solicit their support for the project. This initial contact with the AFC, however, was not followed up and as a result the would-be relationship between the project and the AFC died a natural death leading to the loss of a possible loaning facility. The AFC, however, was not the only agency capable of loaning inputs to peasant farmers. For example, the Catholic Agency for Development in Economic Co-operation (CADEC) and the Evangelical Fellowship are known to have sponsored agricultural cooperatives by giving them loans in cash and requesting payment in kind. There is no evidence from project records to indicate that the project had approached these two non-governmental organizations, for instance, for possible financial support.

Training as a delivery of service in this project refers to the training of the Group Promoters in various job-related skills and training of project beneficiaries in good crop husbandry practices. Although project preparation did include a training programme, the latter lacked an input in the form of a village survey, needs assessment and a market feasibility exercise. The training programme also lacked a methodological input to assist the GPs when it came to their role in training group leaders. As for the training of project participants in crop husbandry skills, it is clear that the demonstration plots in Eastern Rushinga did not train many people. The demonstration plots were supposed to be

"agricultural laboratories" for all groups, but they turned out to be static classrooms for the groups that were attached to the demonstration plots. Whatever training was delivered was not in accordance with the PPP strategy nor did it conform to that of the specific project design. Such training, therefore, cannot be expected to, nor does it, show signs of replicability.

PPP strategy prescribes that during the implementation phase of the project, agro-based income-generating and savings activities be initiated and mobilized. The National Project Coordinator on behalf of the Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs (the implementing agency) began, through the GPs and the group leaders, to seek plots from local village leaders and start crop and vegetable farming schemes. As the pace of group formation increased and the need to generate cash quickly arose, the original agro-based activities became diversified into simple, income-generating activities with bread-baking topping the list. On account of the highly profit-oriented approach to these project activities, vegetable gardens were set up in low water table areas and the baking of bread in a district which does not grow wheat. Besides the lack of basic infrastructure, equipment and a reliable supply of inputs, market gardening and bread-baking do not have the potential for long-term viability and replicability in Rushinga. PPP strategy clearly emphasises market viability and replicability

Savings is a major activity in the implementation of the Rushinga project. As previously reported, 60 out of the 66 projects have a savings club component. Although the savings groups have effectively performed the function of mobilizing funds and training in the need for "budgetary discipline", the money saved is individually owned and is not channelled to group activities. Dependence upon individual savings indicates the difficulty rural people have in respect of loans as they ultimately have to rely upon their own meagre resources.

Observations which relate to the overall management of the project feature two issues, namely, coordination and the target population. With respect to coordination, for example, the late tilling of the demonstration plots is an indication of the lack of this element between the project management and the district authorities who made tractors available. The timing of ploughing is crucial because rains come suddenly and the soil is too hard to plough adequately before that. In fact, correct timing in ploughing can make a big difference to the harvest. What this also meant was that during the 1986/87 planting season the Revolving Fund had bought inputs (seed and fertilizer) which the project group members could not pay for and as a result these items had to be sold on the open market.³⁵

Those small-scale farmers who bought these supplies were obviously not from amongst the "poorest of the poor", and were not, therefore, part of the target group.

It appears that the design of the project did not give much consideration to the question of "who exactly are the poor and how to reach them". Once this had been missed in the project plan it became very difficult to capture the poor during the implementation phase. An analysis of the income-generating activities the project carries out indicates that planning was not comprehensive enough, especially the training of GPs with regard

35 Personal communication from National Project Coordinator.

to the problem-solving process (from identifying community problems to drawing up a plan of action). The implementation of activities also appears to be unsystematic. Perhaps the most important observation about the objective of participatory decision-making pertains to both project planning and project implementation. The people of Rushinga were not asked whether they needed this project. They were never given an opportunity to decide or form their own opinions on how best to solve their problems. The Baseline Study - which did not specifically focus on the "poorest of the poor" - was used to superimpose the project on Rushinga. Similarly, the way the project is managed does not enhance self-management at its various levels. Self-management seems to exist at the group level only - when group members elect their leaders. However, due to the non-homogeneous nature of the groups and the tendency to depend on members with some resources, it is doubtful whether group members really have a choice on whom to elect as their leader.

The question which still needs to be addressed is to what extent have the self-help groups formed under the programme been organized out of the people's initiative to improve their lot or have they been mobilized in response to specific economic forms of assistance provided externally? Our findings point to the latter aspect. Perhaps, this question should be posed to the people themselves as part of the campaign to conscientise themselves in programmes for self-reliance and future development.