

Evaluating Development Programs

**Objective information can help in avoiding ill-planned,
poorly-conducted development programs**

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Economic development programs are characterized as more complex and less well understood than typical Extension undertakings. However, the concept of evaluation is little different in purpose or need from any educational or action program. The differences between evaluating economic development and typical Extension programs are mainly in methods of collecting information, the added difficulty of measuring changes, and the hazards of drawing inferences. A more important difference is the limited substantive base for evaluating economic development programs—it is not so easy to conduct controlled experimentation as the basis for substantive content as it is with the physical and biological sciences (the foundation of much of Extension's program content). Evaluation of existing programs is the primary source of knowledge in economic development.

EARLY EXTENSION programs were directed primarily toward the solution of physical and biological problems. In time, program emphasis was shifted to helping individuals react with their environment that they might gain a larger share of income. Now, programs are centered on helping groups manipulate their economic and social environment to increase the total amount of income to be distributed. Factors such as controlling the rate of capital accumulation, speeding the rate of technological advance, changing human relationships, and manipulating institutional arrangements to control the rate of economic growth have now taken the center of attention—witness the number of programs so identified in re-

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cent years: resource development, economic development, urban and rural development, agricultural and industrial development, area redevelopment, and now tributary area development.

Economic development processes and programs are more complex and less well understood than traditional programs—even by the respective specialists. Supporting agencies are demanding that objective measures of progress be obtained so that decisions about continued support can rationally be made. Even if such an accounting is not demanded, there is a moral obligation to give an unbiased report on the use of support. Unlike traditional programs, most economic development programs are conducted by persons with little formal training in the subject. A knowledge of whether, how, or why a specific program action attained the intended objective is imperative to improving the program. Economists and other social scientists do not have a monopoly on directing economic development programs. County agents, bankers, businessmen, labor leaders, politicians, educators, and physical scientists play most important roles in planning and executing these programs. There are too few persons with specialized training in economic development to provide direct guidance for the many programs in operation. Experts in economic development who can measure and predict economic change hold a leading role in our society.¹

Efforts of Extension technicians and lay people have resulted in comprehensive economic development programs. In this paper, we will discuss some of the requirements of and reasons for such programs, and ramifications of evaluation of program results. Most development programs or plans are complex, unwritten, and largely undefinable.² For purposes of this paper, we will consider an economic development program as a set of planned activities designed to accelerate the rate of increase of an area's total and per capita output.³

¹ For elaboration see Boris P. Pesek, "Economic Growth and Its Measurement," *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, IX (April, 1961), 295.

² For a detailed definition see Kenneth R. Hansen, "Planning Is a Continuing Process," *Science, Technology, and Development*, United States Papers prepared for the United Nations Conference on the Application of Science and Technology for the Benefit of the Less Developed Areas, Volume VIII (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1962), 120.

³ Consistently in discussing economic development one must contend with the terms welfare, output, and income. Increased welfare is the desired objective. Welfare being unmeasurable, output and income are often used as substitutes. For a detailed discussion of the nature of measurement at the national level see Simon Kuznets, "Economic Growth and the Contribution of Agriculture: Notes on Measurement," *Proceedings of the International Conference of Agricultural Economists, Eleventh Conference, 1961* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 39.

Evaluation is usually thought of as the process of collecting information, forming judgments, and drawing conclusions.⁴ It could also be defined as an attempt to measure the degree a particular set of resources is useful in attaining some defined goal or goals. By combining all definitions, we can say that evaluation of economic development programs is the process of collecting information, making measurements, identifying implications, and drawing conclusions to determine the extent a set of planned activities has contributed to a sustained increase in an area's total and per capita output and other goals.

NEED AND FUNCTION OF EVALUATION

The question of whether economic development programs will be evaluated has been settled. Most institutions responsible for planning and conducting action programs are increasing their allocation to and use of more resources for formal evaluation. Although the importance of evaluation has been recognized, the job is not easy. The fact that resources used in evaluation can be applied directly to worthwhile development goals means that evaluation proposals will be carefully examined. Conversely, the fact that objective information can help avoid ill-planned, poorly-conducted development programs means there will continue to be a place for evaluation. "Exaggerated claims of success, imprudent expenditures or uncritical appraisal of results are not unknown causes of failure."⁵

Even if the above reasons did not apply, there is a moral obligation to give an unbiased accounting for the use of public resources. "Officers as well as taxpayers and other supporters deserve a clear, honest statement."⁶

The administrator or project leader of an economic development program shares many common problems with the manager of a private profit-seeking firm. Both obtain and allocate limited resources among alternative methods of achieving major specified goals and minor goals that may not be specified. Principles of operation are similar, but there are differences in details of operation and of guides each has for decision making.

A major difference is that the business firm manager and the production specialist have volumes of professional literature to assist in estimating precise production functions; they have more precise

⁴For example, see Fred P. Frutche, "Evaluation—What It Is," in Darcie Byrn (ed.), *Evaluation in Extension* (Topeka, Kansas: H. M. Ives & Sons, Inc., no date), p. 2.

⁵I. W. Moomaw, *To Hunger No More* (New York: The Friendship Press, 1963), p. 145.

⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 145-46.

goals, more easily identifiable and measurable results, more control of the population, and more historically recorded experience as well as evaluations of comparable programs operating under similar conditions. The business manager and production specialist can make decisions regarding goals with the assumption that the environment, price ratios, and technology will remain relatively constant or follow some established trend. The project leader or program administrator must be concerned with attaining goals by *changing* these environmental factors and their established trends.

Like the business manager, the program administrator applies both efficiency and value criteria in making decisions.⁷ The business manager is concerned primarily with the effects of his decisions on his own firm. The program administrator is concerned with at least three levels of response to his program:

1. The influence his program has on decisions of independent firms and individuals in the area.
2. The influence his program has as an active part of the economy.
3. The influence his program has on the continuation of support from external sources.

All program decisions are based on the knowledge, belief, or assumption that conditions in the program area can be improved with available program resources. The object of evaluation is to provide knowledge that will increase the certainty with which the decision maker can predict and control the influence of his program upon the rate of development and other goals.⁸ Evaluation does not directly add to or detract from the existing program; but indirectly it provides the most logical basis for making decisions that may cause programs to begin, change, or terminate.

CYCLICAL NATURE OF EVALUATION

The process of evaluation can be described in terms of distinct phases of a cycle.

1. Setting evaluation objectives and criteria.
2. Making objective measurements and processing information.

⁷ Efficiency criteria indicate programs and results whose attainment appears technically possible with resources that are or may become available. Value criteria relate to making choices among alternatives that appear technically possible. For a more complete discussion of these criteria see Max F. Millikan, "The Planning Process and Planning Objectives in Developing Countries," in *Science, Technology, and Development*, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

⁸ In other words, evaluation studies describe relative production functions of program inputs to induced economic growth very much as the agronomist defines plant growth resulting from nutrient applications to the root zone.

3. Making subjective judgments to supplement objective measurements.
4. Providing evaluation findings for program decision making.⁹

We need to examine some of the implications here. We can easily determine that the concept of evaluation of an economic development program is little different in purpose or need from that of any educational or action program. It differs from the more traditional programs only in the methods of collecting information, difficulty of measuring changes, and hazards in drawing inferences: More activities are planned; more people are involved; more data are required; more complicated field measurements are involved; measurements are of people rather than things. The drawing of inferences regarding program effectiveness is more complex because sentiments and biases must be overcome with objective findings.

More important than the complexity of the problem is the fact that the body of knowledge available for guidance is much more limited. "Regional economics as a body of knowledge and local economic development as an art are both in their infancy."¹⁰ Dictionaries of economics and social science published during the last 10 years do not even include the terms "economic development" or "resource development." Few public agencies became widely involved in local economic development programs until rural development was started in 1955.¹¹ "The economics and politics of development, once of interest only to scholars, have moved to the top of the world's agenda."¹²

Knowledge of economic development and social processes is not only limited, it has not been widely disseminated. Compared with the number of Extension personnel trained in general agriculture and in the biological sciences, there are relatively few in Extension with training in the social sciences.¹³ Yet, it is social measurements that must be made and social interpretations that are important in evaluating development programs.

⁹ This is similar to the cycle outlined in Samuel P. Hayes, Jr., *Measuring the Results of Development Projects* (Paris, France: UNESCO, 1959), p. 16. Details of this cycle have been elaborated in more detail by the authors. See Billy J. Bond and H. A. Henderson, "Evaluation of Economic Development Programs," paper delivered to Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology Section, Association of Southern Agricultural Workers, Atlanta, Georgia, February, 1964.

¹⁰ Donald R. Gilmore, "Developing the Little Economies," CED Supplementary Paper No. 10, 1959, p. 24.

¹¹ *Progress in the Rural Development Program: First Annual Report of the Secretary of Agriculture, September, 1956* (Washington, D.C.: USDA), p. 3.

¹² Chester Bowles, *The Makings of a Just Society* (Delhi, India: The University of Delhi, India, 1963), p. 13.

¹³ Gilmore, *op. cit.*

EVALUATION IN PLANNING

Evaluation aids in the making of decisions on whether the program will be continued, modified, or terminated.¹⁴ Reference has been made to the development program action cycle and the program evaluation cycle. They are separate cycles but pass through the same point when decisions are made concerning a program. (See Figure 1.) It is at this point that information in the evaluation cycle becomes useful in the development program and accurately interpreted experiences of the past may be used to guide programs.

Research to provide information for traditional Extension programs in the physical and biological sciences is usually carried out in controlled laboratories, plots, and pens, entirely separate from Extension workers, their audience, and programs. However, such control is impractical for most research in economic development; new knowledge may more easily be accumulated by observing results of development programs.

The evaluation and research functions of development programs are essentially the same. One cannot be done without the other. Both measure the results of attempts to change economic conditions

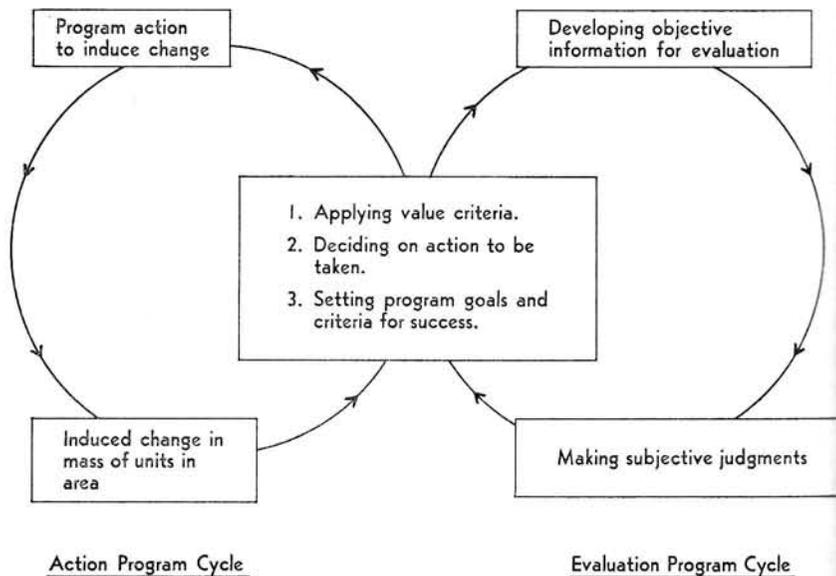


Figure 1. Two related cycles of economic development programs.

¹⁴For a discussion of the importance of using objective data in this phase see Ben Lanham, "Rural Area Development and Manpower Adjustment Programs," paper presented to Southern Regional Agricultural Policy Review Conference, Auburn, Alabama, January 31, 1963, p. 6.

and both gather information that may be used in planning. The techniques for measurement are the same in both functions. The difference is that evaluation produces information on the outcome of one specific program for use in that program while research produces information useful in several programs.

Although developing new knowledge is not normally an Extension function, Extension workers have a vital interest in having new information made available; new information is the commodity they market. They can speed the development of new knowledge by encouraging research workers to evaluate Extension programs. They can help assure a supply of new knowledge by making results of present programs available to research workers for analysis.

SUMMARY

The general process and concept of evaluation of development programs is essentially the same as for traditional Extension programs. The main difference is in the methods of making objective measurements of change, the complexity of the process, the larger number of biases to be overcome, and the limited amount of accepted knowledge to be used in interpretation.

The limited number of persons trained in social sciences, the large number of programs and persons willing to carry out programs, and the complexity of the measurement process suggest a special role for social scientists—measuring and interpreting the amount of change that has taken place and the reasons for it and predicting what change can be expected from proposed programs. In other words, there is a critical need for highly trained specialist personnel who can collect and interpret objective data, while persons trained in other areas may well carry out the program.

Since Extension workers depend on new knowledge as a product to market, they should encourage the continuation of research into economic development processes because the present accepted body of development knowledge is so limited. Evaluation of existing programs is the primary source of new knowledge about economic development processes. Therefore, it is in the interest of Extension workers to encourage research workers to evaluate existing Extension programs to provide (1) specific knowledge to improve existing programs and (2) general knowledge of development processes to guide other development programs.