

PART THREE
ANALYSIS OF PROJECT ELEMENTS

CHAPTER FIVE

INSTITUTIONAL VARIABLES

The preceding two chapters have presented descriptive accounts of successes and failures in erosion control projects. The next chapters will be more analytic in nature, each featuring upon one particular dimension of projects or one aspect of community reality.

The present chapter will examine the institutional context in which projects unfold. In the best of all worlds, this chapter would not be necessary. That is, communities would spontaneously organize themselves, take measures to supply themselves with the necessary tools, seedlings, and other materials, and simply go about the tasks of planting and protecting trees, and building and maintaining erosion control structures. But because this is not the best of worlds, this sequence of events simply never (or virtually never) occurs. It is for this very reason that development organizations come into existence. There are a number of specific, identifiable support services without which communities cannot or will not carry out projects.

But the successful provision of these services in turn presupposes certain institutional capacities on the part of the implementing agencies. But it takes but brief exposure to a handful of development projects to sensitize the observer to weaknesses in the development agencies themselves which prevent them from effectively providing the services which they are mandated to supply.

Rather than launch into a series of random, hit-and-miss criticisms, I will attempt in this chapter, first, to make a systematic inventory of the types of agencies which have been, and will probably continue to be, involved

in soil conservation projects, in Haiti; secondly, to specify in logical and chronological order the principal services which these agencies--particularly the implementing agencies--should provide to community groups to soil conservation projects; and thirdly, to discuss the major weaknesses which research has uncovered in the delivery of each of these services.

5.1 Institutions and Soil Conservation Projects.

Office discussion and even some written reports make a dichotomous distinction between large governmental development agency on the one hand, and the "PVO's," the Private Voluntary Organizations, on the other. This distinction, however, is merely a first approximation and masks a number of important internal distinctions. For purposes of the analysis of past and present soil conservation practices, we can distinguish among five types of development organizations that are above the level of, and provide various types of inputs to the individuals or the local community groups that actually execute the projects.

5.1.1 The Ministries of Agriculture and Education of the GOH.

Within the government of Haiti, the most important organ of recent soil conservation activity has been the Department d'Agriculture, des Ressources Naturelles, et du Développement Rural, popularly called by the place name of its host community, Damien. Damien has had some sort of formal institutional involvement in a number of the more important recent projects investigated in the course of this study. It has generally not been an autonomous, self-sufficient agent; its agents have rather plugged into one or another component of projects funded or otherwise supported by one of the other agencies to be discussed. For example, the two Damien forest

agents currently involved in reforesting the Kenscoff areas depend on one PVO--the Baptist Mission at Fermath--for the majority of their trees, and on another PVO--CARE--for the supply of Food for Work with which they motivate the communities to participate. Damien technicians are also playing leading organizational and technical roles in the context of the UN/FAO project currently in action in and around Limbé.

In addition to Damien, however, ONAAC (Office National d'Alphabétisation et d'Action Communautaire), lodged within the Ministry of Education, has also been involved in soil conservation activities. Some of the rock wall building in and around Anse Rouge, for example, has been organized by ONAAC animators. As with the Damien employees, however, their involvement generally occurs in the context of programs whose material support comes from elsewhere--HACHO in the case of the above-mentioned Anse Rouge activities.

One could view this situation in a negative light, taking it as a symbol of the continuing weakness of national soil conservation institutions. There is some truth in this. But there is a programmatically much more useful construal of this situation. Were it not for the presence of these other institutions, the Damien technicians would have learned nothing, would have accomplished nothing. But the presence of these other projects, funded and administered by outsiders, has been a source of invaluable training and firsthand field experience to a number of Haitian technicians. The training that the technicians are receiving in this context, training that involves not only technical matters, but organizational, motivational, and administrative problems as well, is far superior to the theoretical training which they would receive in Damien itself.

Stated differently, we should consider the presence of these outside projects, not as a plague and curse on the country, as some doctrinaire philosophers of "institution building" would have it, but rather as an invaluable source of training for GOH technicians who become involved, in addition to the benefits which accrue to the communities. The ultimate objective is the strengthening of governmental institutions. But given the contemporary institutional reality of Haiti, an effective path to this goal might entail simultaneously the strengthening of these privately run projects and the incorporation at field level of GOH personnel, in addition to the assistance that is being given directly to Damien.

5.1.2 International Development Agencies.

The major international development agencies which have supported one or another type of soil conservation activity have been the bilateral USAID and the multilateral United Nations, both with central offices in Port-au-Prince. Neither of these agencies is, strictly speaking, an "implementing agency" in their current modus operandi. That is, they do not have direct hire personnel living in the field working directly in the provision of technical or supervisory assistance to GOH counterparts or to community groups. They have become first and foremost funding agencies for projects and to an impressive degree, especially in the case of USAID, serve as employment agencies, carrying out the role of broker in the search for foreign technicians, hired on a contract basis, who will implement projects in collaboration with GOH counterparts.

The earliest systematic soil conservation efforts appear to have been carried out in the context of the UNESCO supported Marbial project of the late forties and early fifties. In addition, the UN recently completed a 10-year project involving soil conservation in the area around Aux Cayes, and is currently carrying out activities in an earlier mentioned project in Limbé. USAID's most direct involvements in soil conservation has been in the context of the PDAI project in the Acui watershed of Aux Cayes. But in addition, USAID has been indirectly involved in soil conservation through its support of various relief agencies such as HACHO and CARE (to be discussed below).

The radically non-implementing character of the U.N. and USAID is a product of recent institutional evolution. As recently as the early sixties, USAID (then called USOM) had direct hire technicians living in the Artibonite working on a daily counterpart basis with GOH technicians involved in the construction of the Peligre dam. Such an arrangement would today be totally out of character with the Agency: the newly-arrived direct hire employee who insisted on living in a project region would come under quick fire from the "new professionals" and would undoubtedly soon find himself beating the corridors in Washington looking for a new country assignment. The evolution of this trend appears to be picking up even more momentum. Counterpart relationships even at the ministerial level now appear to be a quickly fading fiction. The employees who have GOH counterparts appear to meet them only sporadically and--in some recent cases--only with marked institutional and interpersonal strain. But an increasing number of Agency employees have been freed from the discomfort of such strains by their total involvement in Agency-internal planning, bookkeeping, and evaluation.

The insulated character of these activities is viewed as a weakness only by a minority of direct-hire employees, generally the older technicians who look back with approval on the earlier field activities of the Agency, or younger employees with a Peace Corps or some other volunteer background who had envisioned a USAID career as a professionalization, perhaps at a somewhat higher level, of permanent, direct developmental involvement with

foreign counterparts and with the day-to-day problems of program implementation. The prevailing ethos, however, appears to accept the new office-based role of the Agency as somehow being the necessary prelude to GOH "institution building," and which in some cases even dismisses the learning of Creole and the making of frequent field trips as perhaps suitable for lower-order technicians and other temporary amateurs, but hardly necessary activities for the true developmental "pro."

A dispassionate assessment is needed of this issue, because in discussing it we are in reality discussing what the nature of USAID should be as a developmental agency. I will here restrict my comments to what I have observed in the course of my observation of soil conservation projects in Haiti, trying to arrive at a sense of the "strengths" and "weaknesses" inherent in USAID's current operational style.

Of all the developmental agencies observed, USAID is by far the most "powerful," by at least two definitions of the term. In the first place, the unparalleled amount of money it disburses places it in a position of greater potential influence than agencies with fewer resources at their disposition. But secondly and more concretely, USAID has in fact been indirectly involved in more soil conservation projects than any other institution by virtue of the direct and indirect support it has given to the various PVO's in Haiti, the operational groups which have actually implemented projects.

Another source of potential strength is in the collective expertise of an organization whose employees have had developmental experience in all parts of the globe. This expertise should be found not only in the minds of those walking about USAID corridors but also in the documentation available to the agency.

It must be stated, however, that from the point of view of soil conservation projects these potential strengths have not been exploited.

In the first place, USAID has not yet helped steer its client PVO's in the direction of sound soil conservation practices, but has to some degree continued to mechanically pump resources into projects that have not only been poorly executed but poorly conceived from the start. Many of the HACHO wall building projects in the Northwest, for example, in which many "soil conservation" structures are laboriously erected on barren hillsides that have seen few raindrops and have never felt the cultivator's hoe, show a lack of systematic planning. As a major funder of HACHO, USAID has, at not time, used its potential influence to alter HACHO policy in these specific matters. This failure, of course, stems from the absence within USAID itself of a coherent plan of attack on this issue. The theme of "agroforestation" discussed in this report, in which soil conservation is planned in the context of profit-oriented peasant cultivation, could provide one such conceptual anchor. But the Agency needs some such anchor if it is to exercise its potential influence over implementing agencies.

In terms of its collective expertise, there is a conspicuous lack of documentation. The recently established library in USAID/Haiti is an invaluable resource which should be broadened and strengthened. But in discussing soil-conservation, for example, the country mission should have at its disposition a vast inventory of projects that have been tried in other countries, by USAID and other agencies, with comments on successful and unsuccessful approaches. Such documentation is not currently available and missions may find themselves reinventing wheels.

What of inherent "weaknesses" in the Agency, which might hamper its effectiveness in soil conservation practices?

One weakness is to be found in a tendency to "over-bureaucratize" and "over-structure" its projects. To exemplify concretely, current planning envisions the following possible approach to soil conservation. USAID will contract with a private U.S. agency to provide technical assistance. This agency will in turn subcontract with available technicians (many of whose availability may stem from unemployment or old age retirement). These technicians will, in turn, work with Damien technicians. Finally Damien technicians will work directly with the community groups which will build the structures and plant the trees. Such planning is impeccably consistent with current agency procedures, but outsiders may be pardoned for skepticism concerning the eventual outcome of this long chain. Current slogans emphasize reaching the poor; but institutional practice continues to interpose resource-consuming structures which appear to complicate tremendously the flow of assistance to the areas where it is needed.

Another weakness stems from an institutional tendency to diffuse responsibility and to free employees from the negative results of careless planning. To exemplify concretely again in the context of past soil conservation, the PDAI in Damien, funded by USAID, commenced its watershed activities with the most ambitious socio-economic survey, entailing hundreds of thousands of questionnaires, ever undertaken in Haiti. The survey was poorly designed and even more poorly supervised. The survey has never been analyzed or even coded; the questionnaires lie rotting in different communities around the country. Thousands upon thousands of dollars were wasted.

If the employees of a private corporation had wasted money in this fashion, heads would have rolled. But the custodians of public money can commit such travesties with virtual impunity. The individuals in USAID responsible for this undertaking have long since departed and it is unlikely that any negative sanctions were ever applied around this particular survey issue. In fact, it is unlikely that anybody in the mission even remembers the survey.

Such travesties must be seen, however, less as products of personal incompetence or irresponsibility, than as the result of an institutional structure which makes it difficult for an employee to sink his or her teeth into a project with some administrative power. When the goal of "institutional building" is interpreted as meaning that "the host government can do with the money what it pleases without our interference", then USAID is, in effect, consigning its employees to the pathetic role of facilitating the flow of money into hands that they know will not use it effectively.

It is clear that this phenomenon is a critical weakness; but unfortunately it is not clear what can be done to turn the process around. Even if USAID maintains its role as a funding, non-implementing agency, it can hopefully devise formulas for giving its technicians and administrators some genuine power in the disposition of the funding which the Agency so copiously supplies. It is not being recommended here that USAID reverts to direct implementation, but merely that it finds some middle ground to permit it to intervene with some clout in the soil conservation projects which it supports.

5.1.3 International Relief Agencies

Most of the village-level developmental action that has occurred in Haiti during the past twenty-five years has proceeded on the basis of assistance from well-known international relief agencies, both religious and secular in character. Among the more important agencies Church World Service (CWS), CARE, Catholic Relief Service (CRS), and the Haitian-American Community Help Organization (HACHO). The first three of the above mentioned agencies are international in character. HACHO, in contrast, was founded in the 1960's with U.S. foreign assistance funds after the deterioration in diplomatic relations led to the cessation of formal assistance from the U.S. government.

Each of these agencies has become involved in soil conservations as part of its developmental activities. But the character of the projects varies greatly. HACHO, for example, has funded thirty disguised humanitarian relief projects which have taken the form of the massive building of rock walls on barren, unclaimed land in the Northwest where the absence of both rainfall and crops technically reduces the need for erosion control measures. What was needed in these instances were projects which would justify the disbursal of large amounts of relief food during droughts and famines, and wall building stepped in to fill that need. But HACHO has also funded reforestation activities of a more extended and serious nature in the Jean-Rabel area. This project entailed contracting the services of two young foresters from Virginia Polytechnical Institute, each of whom spent approximately a year in the project area.

These international relief agencies differ profoundly in their modus operandi from agencies such as USAID and the U.N. In the first place, most of them make at least some attempt to be "operational." Even Catholic Relief Service, one of whose administrators disclaimed the title of "operational", nonetheless has full time Haitian employees who make regular visits to field operations. At the other extreme is HACHO, which is highly operational in character. HACHO has extensive operations in four towns of the Northwest (Anse Rouge, Jean Rabel, Mole St. Nicholas, and Terre Neuve), operations which include hospitals, large warehouses, irrigation and potable water projects, and even "hotels" for lodging the large numbers of visitors who have occasion to drop in on the activities.

Secondly, these agencies often find themselves in a position of substantial economic dependence on the international agencies. This is most true of HACHO, whose very existence was threatened by the withdrawal of USAID funding. But it is also true of the other three agencies mentioned, a substantial part of whose activities consist of the humanitarian or work-related distributions of enormous amounts of USAID-mediated food. These organizations would either have to close up shop or at least substantially curtail their activities if this food and other types of USAID support were suddenly withdrawn.

In many soil conservation projects, these agencies have been the direct point of contact between the outside world and the community group implementing the project. As will be seen below, project weaknesses and failures have frequently stemmed directly from problems in these institutions.

5.1.4 Local Missionary Groups.

Haiti is probably unique in the Western Hemisphere, and perhaps in the world, in terms of its number of missionaries per square mile. A large number of fly-by-night groups, including numerous U.S. based groups who organize yearly summer excursions into the Haitian countryside, restrict their activities to preaching the Word. But the long-standing groups tend, in addition to their religious activities, to maintain one or another form of material project, generally (but not exclusively) entailing the delivery of medical services.

Such missionary groups have for years been involved in reforestation and erosion control activities. These activities vary from occasional, sporadic attempts, such as those of the Catholic Oblate Fathers in various communities of the South, to the establishment of large nurseries which have been instrumental in supplying the trees for an entire region. Here reference is being made to the nursery established by Ronald Smith in conjunction with the Hopital Bon Samaritain in Limbé, and to the nursery established by the Turnbells in the Baptist mission of Fermath. Long before the establishment of their nursery, the Turnbells had also been instrumental in teaching wall building and terracing techniques in their region.

Unlike the international relief agencies, these missionary groups have maintained a total or almost total economic independence from USAID and other international agencies. In fact, in the course of my research as a USAID consultant, I was the recipient of several courteous tongue-lashings concerning the kafkaesque, bureaucratic experiences which certain of these groups had undergone in their efforts to secure something as straightforward

as a project vehicle from USAID.

Because of their long-standing presence in the community, many of these groups have direct contact with the various community organizations in their regions and for this reason have been (and could continue to be) among the most effective intermediaries in reforestation and terracing projects that are channeled through private agencies rather than through the GOH.

5.1.5 U.S. Based Contract Agencies.

The most recent arrival among development groups is the private development company which specializes in the provision of short-term consultants and long-term contract technicians to USAID. The appearance of these groups can be directly linked to the earlier discussed evolution of USAID away from field activities into full-time planning, bookkeeping, and evaluation. Their appearance is said by some to be the product of a decision taken under the Nixon administration to make overseas development a matter for private enterprise. This recent trend has resulted in a decision by some major U.S. corporations to enter the development field through the creation of special subunits within the corporation (Westinghouse Health System: has already carried out a two-year contract with USAID/Haiti). It has furthermore buttressed the tendency of academic institutions to seek a corporate foothold in this field. (Louisiana State University and Virginia Polytechnic Institute have already supplied consultants and technicians to USAID/Haiti, and negotiations were recently being held with Michigan State University to provide services as well.)

But most impressively this trend has triggered off the rapid proliferation of numerous private corporations, frequently sporting catchy names (Experience, Inc., Practical Concepts, Inc.), generally having an office in Washington, D.C. permitting proximity to the source of all funds. These outfits keep close vigilance on the appearance of new RFP's ("Requests for Proposals") from USAID and other public institutions and compete for the honor of filling these contracts.

In at least two senses the institutionalization of this arrangement constitutes a dangerous tendency, not only from the point of soil conservation projects, but from a general developmental perspective as well. In the first place this particular use of "private enterprise," far from decreasing the cost of projects, has caused budgets to skyrocket by virtue of a number of debilitating "overhead" arrangements. The most impressive example concerns the winning of "IQC's" (Indefinite Quantity Contracts), in which company overhead may be computed as double the daily consultant fee. To the degree that such short-term inputs are technically necessary to soil conservation activities, a contract arrangement of this sort constitutes a overwhelming burden on project budgets.

But more seriously, the contract arrangement is weakened by tendency of the companies (and the universities) to themselves rely on subcontracting to outsiders. It is rare for the companies to provide the required services with their own direct-hire personnel.

Rather, they maintain lists of consultants and technicians available on short notice. The result is a strong tendency for the experts to be individuals who are either unemployed or retired. It is, in short, not at all clear whether these contract arrangements are in fact providing USAID with the cream of U.S. private enterprise.

USAID's soil conservation efforts here have already relied on contract arrangements. A forester and a soils-conservation technician, hired under contract, spent several years in the Acul watershed. And, as mentioned earlier, Virginia Polytechnic Institute was contracted to supply HACHO with two forestry specialists for the Jean Rabel area. Most significantly current planning in the Agricultural Development Office envisions reliance on the contract system--probably with a firm such as Pacific Consultants--to supply Damien with long-term technical support in soil conservation activities. That is, the strengths and weaknesses of these contract groups will in the future exert an even heavier impact on the course of soil conservation in Haiti.

The preceding pages have attempted to identify and briefly discuss the various types of agencies involved in the funding and implementation of soil conservation projects in Haiti. The research workscope requested observations on the strengths and weaknesses of such agencies, and the preceding comments have been a preliminary attempt to distinguish between the different groups and to provide an overall sense of the particular developmental niche which each occupies.

But strengths and weaknesses can be better assessed when we examine soil conservation projects in more detail. The following sections will break soil conservation projects down into their constituent tasks and analyze the manner in which these tasks have been neglected or poorly executed by the different types of implementing agencies.

5.2 Project Task Analysis: The Functions of the Implementing Agencies

In specifying the tasks which institutions must carry out, I believe we must distinguish between two types of projects, each of which will have a somewhat different series of tasks, at least in the initial stages of the project. The first type of project entails what falls under the rubric of "community development". According to the "classic" community development philosophy which prevailed in the fifties and sixties, in this type of project communities chose their own objectives and implementing agencies helped them reach these objectives. The initial tasks in this case entail preliminary research to learn what types of projects the communities want and meetings to help the communities plan their strategies for acquiring the necessary types of support to carry out the project.

Soil conservation in Haiti has not, will not, and should not be treated as a community development project in the sense mentioned above. It belongs rather to a second major type of project, one whose necessity has been determined outside the community.

If development agencies were to wait for the peasant communities of Haiti to spontaneously prioritize tree planting and earthwork construction, it is unlikely that soil conservation would ever be achieved. In removing soil conservation from the rubric of community development, I am not suggesting that many elements of community development strategy would not be useful and essential to the program. Without community participation in key operational decisions, the project is unlikely to succeed. But the initial tasks of a soil conservation project--the services which implementing agencies must provide--are of a somewhat different character.

The major tasks of implementing agencies are as follows:

1. Research and feasibility assessment.
2. Planning.
3. Community selection.
4. Pre-project education and motivation.
5. Organization of community groups.
6. Technical training of skilled laborers and of the community at large.
7. Supply of tools and seedlings.
8. Supplies of money and/or food.
9. Supervision of work.
10. Formative evaluation for mid-course corrections.
11. Follow-up and maintenance support and services.

These tasks can be viewed as the major areas in which implementing agencies can and should provide services to communities targeted for soil conservation projects. This list, which is arranged in rough chronological order, provides us a paradigm for examining and assessing the performance of the agencies and a consequent basis for making systematically derived recommendations.

Each of these tasks merits at least brief discussion.

5.2.1 Research and Feasibility Assessment.

This first task of the implementing agency entails gathering information, not only on the causes of soil erosion in the targeted region, but also information on the economy and social organization of the communities of the region, as well as the previous exposure which these communities have had with development projects of one sort or another.

5.2.2. Preliminary Project Planning

This task entails the design of a preliminary plan of attack subject substantial to modification on the basis of preproject discussions with participating community groups and mid-course corrections made on the basis of ongoing assessments of project effectiveness. The preliminary plan should not only contain the standard personnel and budget breakdowns, but should contain a precise cost/benefit analysis of treated hillsides from the viewpoint of the participating peasants. That is, the program planning should entail precise micro-economic analysis of the advantages to accrue to the peasants who participate in the project.

5.2.3 Community Selection

The general region in which the project is to take place will probably have been made at the time the project was first conceptualized. But it will subsequently be necessary to choose specific communities which will be affected by the project and to decide the order in which the communities will be approached. The choice should ideally be made on the basis of some ecologically relevant criterion. For example if the project is a watershed restoration project, then standard procedure is to choose communities furthest up into the watershed.

5.2.4 Pre-project Education and Motivation

As the first stage of the field component, project personnel must establish contact with the community and explain to them the nature and purpose of the intended interventions. The ideal situation would be one in which the project arrives with such an attractive package that the community spontaneously invites the project's presence. Experience has been, however, that in the domain of soil conservation this rarely occurs. The education process should be two-way, project personnel modifying certain aspects of their plan on the basis of feedback, suggestions, or objections from the community members. The end result of this highly delicate phase will hopefully be a decision, more or less generally consented to, to participate in the soil conservation project.

5.2.5 Organization of Community Groups

If there are pre-existing, functional community action groups, they may be the entities to implement the soil conservation project. If there are no groups, or the groups are non-functional or dominated by particular or alien interests, the project should use the service of trained animators to form new groups. If new groups are being formed, where all possible the groups should be formed on the basis of land ownership on the treated hillsides. This would result in groups being constituted of members cropping contiguous plots of ground.

5.2.6 Technical Training of Skilled Laborers and of the Community at Large

As the project proceeds, the intent will be to instruct the community in heretofore unknown soil conservation and tree planting techniques. This will entail training a small number of individuals in specialized tasks, such as use of the A-frame and planting of trees, and the general instruction of the community in more common conservation-related tasks such as the building of rock walls and the maintenance of trees.

5.2.7 Supply of Materials

The implementing agency will generally have to supply tools of several types for the carrying out of different types of soil conservation activities. In addition the project will in all likelihood decide to supply the seedlings. This latter task entails not only the establishment of project nursery, but also the maintenance of one or more trucks.

5.2.3 Supply of Money and/or Food

If the decision is made to systematically remunerate individuals for labor on the project, the implementing agency will have to have a system for the regular disbursement of payroll funds or the regular (at least monthly) shipment of food into the project region.

5.2.9 Supervision of Work

By no means will it suffice for the implementing agency to give initial technical instruction and then let the project unfold on its own. Technical supervision will have to be constant, and the ideal arrangement is one in which project technicians are out working on a daily basis along with the peasants themselves in the treatment of hillsides. Supervision will further be required in the distribution of the money of food, this being an area where corruption has often entered, sabotaging the morale of many a project.

Formative Evaluation for Mid-Course Corrections

It would generally be disastrous for projects to mechanically barrel along following the plans that were forged in the early stages of the project. The implementing agency will have to combine a knack for systematic, tight planning with a simultaneous openness, flexibility, and--if possible--a sense of humour when it becomes obvious that nothing is working as planned. Mid-course corrections should be made, combining the use of ad-hoc, creative maneuvers with an underlying substratum of systematic planning. But these mid-course corrections

can be made only if project directors and administrators have ongoing direct contacts with field realities and a willingness to receive feedback from project technicians and--especially--from community members. Ideally project directors should have direct pipelines to the communities and not depend on their project subordinates as their sole eyes and ears into village realities.

5.2.10 Follow-up and Maintenance Support and Services

The fragility of young trees and of most erosion control structures creates a situation in which projects must have some built-in strategy for encouraging the maintenance of project achievements. It has not generally been the case that communities will, on completion of the work, spontaneously protect the trees and maintain the walls or canals. Projects must extend themselves for a reasonable amount of time and distinguish between construction and maintenance phases, devising motivations and sanctions appropriate to each phase.