LINKING WITH AGRICULTURAL AND SOCIAL GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS FOR SCALING-UP NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION (NGO) RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS IN MEXICO

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Abstract

In the last ten years, the number of NGO rural development projects has been increasing in Mexico. Many of them have been successful in their pilot phase of 2 or 3 years. Evaluation studies questioned how to deal with these projects in order to expand the experiences to other communities. In response to this, in Mexico, the representatives of some NGO projects and state programs decided to share resources for scaling up. This evaluative research identified some evidence of the scaling-up results and the processes of six projects. A survey method, face-to-face interview and direct observation were used to collect information from the beneficiary small farmers, technicians, and coordinators of the projects and the representatives of the state programs. Two of the six projects were very successful for scaling-up their experiences because of the successful linkages: while one of them mostly linked with the state program, the other one did it with the local institutions and organizations. For the other two projects, the scaling-up experiences were fairly successful; and for the last one, there were no scaling-up results. Eight factors were identified that favored or hindered the results: 1) the quality performance of the NGO staff; 2) the degree of communication between the project and program personnel; 3) the financial and other resources of NGOs; 4) the resources availability of the government programs for the projects; 5) the degree of participation and organization of the farmers in the project; 6) the expectations of the new beneficiaries of the technologies and experiences of the projects; 7) the nature of the introduced technologies and organization; and 8) the socioeconomic and political context in which the projects were operating.
Introduction

Since the 1960s, in the Third World countries two basic organizational paradigms for promoting agricultural and rural development have dominated the scene (Uvin and Miller, 1994). The first has been the top-down, usually state-led model, and the second, the bottom-up grass-roots model. These authors indicate that for most of the last thirty years, the first model has been dominant, with the governments, the development aid system and most development scholars. Yet, this has been the subject of severe criticism, because of its very inefficiency in “creating development”; and the projects were proven to be largely unsustainable because of lack of local institutional involvement (Gordillo, 1999).

In reaction to the perceived deficiencies and injustices of the top down model, the bottom-up model emerged (Castillo, 1995). Its origin dates from the 1960s by Non Government Organizations (NGOs), but it gained only broad acceptance in the second half of the 1980s. The bottom-up model seeks to organize development from below and to increase the capacity of poor people and communities to organize their lives. In short, it seeks to “empower” themselves through participation in their own development. In the 1980s, for various reasons, this strategy became increasingly accepted by the development community. Among others, project and sectoral evaluations revealed that projects that were not appropriated by local institutions tended to be much less successful and less sustainable than those in which local communities played a central role. A deep economic financial crisis hit most Third World governments in the 1980s. Finally, the dominant global ideology of the 1980s was strongly in favor of anything that was not public.

In spite of the bottom-up successful experiences and increasing the number of NGOs, hunger and poverty of millions of rural people in the Third World have continued. How can the successful bottom-up experiences be expanded in order to help in solving this problem? What strategies can be utilized? These have been some of the questions raised for development researchers, practitioners and politicians. In response to these questions, there were initial scaling-up experiences in Africa, Asia, and Latin America (IIRR, 1999; IDRC, 1999 and Uvin and Miller, 1994). From these, some favoring and hindering factors for scaling up of rural development experiences were identified and then tried to construct a theoretical explanation.

According to the literature, different definitions of scaling-up have been used, but the most commonly used has been equated as expansion of membership or target group. According to Uvin and Miller (1994), there are two types of scaling-up: organizationally and functionally or active -wise. Organizationally means “serving larger constituencies” (the same organization, keeping the same goals, grows in size). This is the same as expansion. Functionally means the same organization increases or diversifies its range of activities regardless of size. The scaling-up experiences were also classified according to their structures, programs, strategies, and resource bases. Finally, these authors distinguished five basic paths for increasing the size of the NGO projects: 1) spread (increasing the size of people, who spontaneously adhere to the organization and its program); 2) replication ( a model approach is tested on a small scale and successful results are promoted on a large scale; often this has been called pilot program); 3) nurture (a well staffed and well funded outside agency, using a specific incentive-based methodology, nurtures local initiatives on an increasingly larger scale; 4) aggregation (a number of distinct organizations combine their
resources; finally, 5) integration (a program is integrated into existing structures after its potential has been demonstrated). For the last of them, alliances and partnership efforts might be used.

Following the background of NGO rural development projects, at the beginning of the 1990s, a new model has been emerging, drawing on the best of both previous top down and bottom up strategies. It holds that the state remains necessary, for only it has the capacity to enable and coordinate the work of NGOs and private initiative on the scale that will make a difference. It can do this by providing certain public services, enabling legislation and subventions in the form of entitlements. Interacting with the state should be a new breed of large, well managed and competent NGOs that are capable of mobilizing the participation of large numbers of people and channeling large sums of money to large scale activities (Miranda, 2000). At the state side of the equation, this involves willingness and a capacity to take a partnership position with civil society, to create an “enabling environment” for private initiatives. At the NGO side, it implies the need for scaling-up: to increase their size, complexity, impact and interaction with the state.

In Mexico, in the last years, in spite of the environment constraints of scarce resources for social programs, numerous small rural development projects were successful achieving their pilot phase objectives. The last proceedings of the annual meeting of the National Network of Sustainable Rural Development Projects indicated that, from the last four meetings, there were 2,790 cases. Some of them were those supported by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation (Red Nacional de Desarrollo Rural Sustentable, 1999). Based on the information of the two first annual meetings, the General Director of the Rural Development office of the Agricultural, Livestock and Rural Development Secretariat (SAGAR in Spanish), the Regional Director for Latin America of the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, with an office in Mexico, and the NGO coordinators of nine projects, in 1997 decided, by agreement, to share resources and efforts in order to strengthen and expand the successful experiences of the projects.

Therefore, the W. K. Kellogg Foundation decided to make an additional donation to six projects that finished the pilot phase. Each of these projects was located in the micro-region of the following states: Guerrero, Sonora, Oaxaca, Chiapas, Guanajuato, and Yucatán. It was assumed that these efforts would be consolidated with the resources coming from the Alianza para el Campo (Alliance for Improving Agriculture), a national program operating in the whole country, in order to strengthen the projects and expand their successful experiences to other communities.

Two years after these collaborative initiatives were started, both the Regional Director of the Kellogg Foundation and the General Director of Rural Development of SAGAR, wanted to know the advances and results of this scaling-up initiative. The evaluation group of the Colegio de Postgraduados (a graduate college in agriculture) was asked to evaluate this scaling-up project. This paper presents the main results of the evaluative research.

**Purpose of the study**

The overall purpose of the study was to determine the results and process of the scaling-up experience of six NGO rural development projects.
The objectives were:

1. To determine the expansion results of the six projects in terms of community and farmers involved in the projects and types of technologies and development initiatives introduced.

2. To determine the degree of participation of government programs, specially Alianza para el Campo and non government institutions in the process of the project scaling-up.

3. To identify the influencing factors that helped or hindered the scaling-up process of the NGO projects.

Methodology and Procedures

This research of integrated evaluation was carried out based on the methodological experiences of evaluation of rural development programs in Mexico. The design for the study was the descriptive analytical research, oriented by the formative approaches. Data were gathered from the following sources: 102 beneficiary farmers, 20 technicians/promoters and 6 project coordinators, six groups of official representatives of the government programs, direct observation, and review of official documents of the projects. A survey method with face-to-face interview was used to collect data from a non probabilistic sample of farmers (17 per project). A census was used to gather data from technicians/promoters and coordinators of the projects. For the survey and census, three types of questionnaires were designed. In addition, meeting interviews were used to gather data from official representatives of the government programs. Finally, data from the questionnaires were entered into a computer using Excel, and descriptive statistics were determined using the same package. Data from the interviews and direct observation were organized and analyzed using a kind of analytic induction, describing key incidents and concrete examples.

Results

General characteristics of the projects

The main purpose of the six projects has been to improve life conditions of families. The specific objectives were: to improve staple food production and animal and horticultural backyard production, keeping safe the degradation of natural resources. Therefore, the projects included the introduction of new technologies, training and technical assistance, microfinance systems, conservation of natural resources, and home economics. Most of the families participating in the project were poor, with scarce natural resources for agriculture, including soil and water. The communication infrastructure was also scarce. In spite of these limitations, the projects, in the pilot phase, demonstrated improvement of the staple food production and introduced organization for additional economic and social projects. The most important, people participating in the project became motivated to continue or initiate projects in order to improve their family lives and local communities.

The scaling-up results

The results of the scaling-up of the six projects were different. As seen in Table 1, the number of communities involved and the technologies and strategies used to improve food production and family welfare were different. In the expansion phase, five of the six projects got to involve more communities than the pilot phase. However, the Oaxaca and Yucatán projects got more communities and peasants involved in the projects. The explanations for this are in the next paragraphs. In the case of the Oaxaca project, the communities involved were not
only from the pilot phase region, but also from other regions with similar geographical characteristics. The success of this was a simple sprinkle irrigation system used for hillside agriculture.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Projects</th>
<th>Pilot phase</th>
<th>Expansion phase</th>
<th>Technologies and strategies expanded</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Projected*</td>
<td>Expanded*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guerrero</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>25 Small irrigation systems for horticulture, microfinance/microlending, and microenterprise development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonora</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18 Community bank, backyard horticultural production and microenterprises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oaxaca</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>27 Small sprinkle irrigation system and microfinance/microlending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chiapas</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24 Soil conservation system for staple food production and microfinance/microlending</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guanajuato</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11 Natural resource conservation for food production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yucatán</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>26 Microfinance/microlending and backyard food and medicinal plant production</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* = the number of communities includes the pilot phase communities

The results of the scaling-up efforts were not only involved in terms of number of communities, but also in the amount of resources succeeded and the institutions and organizations involved. As shown in Table 2, the Oaxaca and Yucatán projects mobilized resources not only from the Alianza para el Campo, but also from other state programs, and non governmental programs and institutions. Though, in this study, it was not possible to get information about the total amount of resources obtained by the projects for the expansion phase, the following data of the Oaxaca project, one of the best examples, give us an idea of the mobilized resources for the project. “We get to meet resources in an equivalent amount to US$400,000 that benefited almost 600,000 peasants and their families…” only in the expansion phase of two years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Projects</th>
<th>State programs</th>
<th>Non state programs or institutions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alianza para el Campo</td>
<td>Other programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guerrero</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td>Xx</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Oaxaca</td>
<td>xxx</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guanajuato</td>
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<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yucatán</td>
<td>nothing</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tbody>
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Scale: x = low; xx = medium; xxx = high
The collaborative experiences with the Alianza para el Campo programs. Despite the collaborative agreement among the representatives of the Alianza para el Campo programs, the Kellogg Foundation, and the NGO projects, there were very unequal results. The Oaxaca and Chiapas projects were more successful to get resources from the Alianza para el Campo programs than the Guerrero, Sonora and Guanajuato projects. The Yucatán project did not get any resources from this governmental program, but it did from other programs and institutions (Table 2). The resources obtained from the Alianza para el Campo were basically in goods, such as seeds, fruit plants, livestock animals, agricultural tools and equipment, and wages of the project technicians. Although the projects presented a budget for the representatives of the Alianza Para el Campo programs, there were no responses according to the applied budget projects in most of the cases. In fact, in 1998 the Guerrero project, received resources of only an equivalent of 3.8% from the total applied budget. This was basically because of the bureaucratic administration, insufficient resources and the local institution policies.

Some identified factors for helping or hindering the scaling-up experiences. Finally, from the study, eight factors were identified for favoring or limiting the scaling-up experiences. These are: 1) the performance quality of the NGO staff; 2) the degree of communication between the project and programs personnel; 3) the financial and other resources of NGOs; 4) the resource availability of the government programs for the projects; 5) the degree of participation and organization of the farmers in the project; 6) the expectations of the new beneficiaries of the technologies and experiences of the projects; 7) the nature of the introduced technologies and organization; and 8) the socioeconomic and political context in which the projects were operating.

Conclusion

In the time of severe crisis of agriculture, increasing rural poverty, on one hand, state participation reduction for promoting rural development, on the other hand, organizations and institutions of the civil society (NGOs) were increasing and were achieving important experiences for promoting agricultural and rural development. Nevertheless, the successful experiences were not expanded to other areas or regions because of scarce resources of NGO initiatives. The study of six projects demonstrated that scaling-up results were different among them, in terms of number of communities expanded, resources mobilized and institutions involved. However, there are opportunities for collaborative and alliance efforts, including liaison with local, regional and state level institutions and social organizations. The study also demonstrated that the state is necessary, for providing resources, certain public services and enabling legislation. Therefore, the traditional negative bureaucratic performance, lack of resources for the programs, must be changed and the attitude of some public officials to the NGO organizations and projects improved. For achieving successful rural development programs, interacting with the state should be a new breed of large, well managed and competent NGOs that are capable of mobilizing the participation of large numbers of people and channeling large sums of money to large scale activities.

Educational Importance

In a time of increasing poverty in rural areas of developing countries, among other important strategies, successful rural development experiences must be expanded and evaluation must be
carried out. NGO staffs, farmers, local institutions and organization leaders, and government officers need to know and learn from the new scaling up experiences and challenges.

References


