A cultural anthropologist suggests that examination of technological development programs of the past 20 years reveals certain empirically derived principles which have stood the test of time and which, if followed in setting the limits of community development programs, will greatly increase the chances of success.

Guidelines to

Community Development Programs

By GEORGE M. FOSTER, Ph.D.

DURING the spring term of 1954, I participated in an informal discussion group in the University of California's School of Public Health at Berkeley.

This group, which met for six 2-hour sessions over a period of 12 weeks, was composed of faculty members and foreign and native North American graduate students, most of whom had had field experience in areas other than the United States. The foreign students—there

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were four—were members of international public health organizations active in Brazil, Ceylon, and Iran. The United States participants based their remarks on their various work experiences in China, India, Southeast Asia, Mexico, El Salvador, Puerto Rico, Peru, and Chile.

The general topic of the meetings, which was never formally stated, had to do with the manner in which cultural factors bear upon the success or failure of community development programs. Though the group was primarily interested in questions of public health, it soon became apparent that public health could not be treated as an isolated problem and that the community itself must constitute the real focal point of interest.

There emerged from the deliberations of the group the conviction that, although precise rules for successful work in any geographic area, or any limited disciplinary field, could not be laid down, there were, nevertheless, certain general principles which seemed to hold good in most situations. These cannot be thought of as "principles" in the scientific sense of the word, but rather in the sense of empirically derived rules which, if borne in mind by field personnel, would contribute to the success of their programs. These rules, which constitute the greater part of this report, are in no sense new or original. They represent, rather, a summary of field experience of the discussion group, sup-

Members of the Discussion Group

Foreign students:

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Jessie M. Bierman, M.D., professor of maternal and child health.

George M. Foster, visiting professor of anthropology and lecturer in public health.

William Griffiths, associate professor of public health.

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Ann Haynes, visiting professor of public health education and chief, bureau of health education, California State Department of Public Health.

Ruth Huenemann, lecturer in public health nutrition.

Sarah Mazelis, associate in public health.

Edward S. Rogers, M.D., professor of public health and medical administration.

United States students:

Ernest Bertellotti, Dorothy Craig, John Hayakawa, Ellen James, Virginia Pence, and Edward Riggs, M.D.

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plemented by the conclusions contained in a series of papers and books which have appeared over the past 15 years. They may be thought of as a "practical," "rule-of-thumb," or "workingman's" guide rather than as a theoretical statement of the principles of culture change.

Since general theoretical principles are not dealt with at length here, it is desirable to state more precisely the limits of the problem as considered by the group. Early in the discussion it was agreed that the concept of culture constituted the key to the problem. Simple definitions of culture were accepted: the common way of life shared by the members of a group, consisting of the totality of tools, techniques, social institutions, behavior patterns, attitudes, beliefs, motivations, systems of values, and the like—or, to use Linton's short definition (1): behavior and the products of behavior of a human group.

Two basic aspects of culture were found to bear directly on the problem.

First, it was agreed that any culture should be thought of as a functional, integrated whole, and not as a haphazard collection of customs and habits. If the analogy is not carried too far, a culture could be compared, it was felt, to a biological organism, in that each of its parts is related in some way to all other parts. Each part fulfills a definite function in relationship to the other parts and contributes to the normal functioning of the culture as a whole. Each part, in turn, draws upon all the other parts in some way for its own continued existence, and its growth and development are dependent on corresponding growth and development in the culture as a whole.

To illustrate this concept of integration in terms of public health, it was pointed out that preventive medicine and sanitation projects are not isolated parts of the life of a people. They are related to education, economic productivity, distribution of income, social security, municipal administration, philosophical and religious premises, and a host of other things. Changes in the level of health in any given region may result from improvements or changes in these aspects of culture. Conversely, changes that can be brought about by planned action are limited by, and dependent on, the changes that simultaneously are occurring, or can be made to occur, in these related aspects.

Second, the group recognized that all cultures are capable of change and that all cultures are constantly changing, whether the pace be rapid or slow. It was agreed that there are definite, though unfortunately imperfectly understood, rules of human behavior which govern the processes whereby changes occur. In general, there appear to be two basic types of culture change: One may be called "spontaneous," or perhaps "evolutionary," in that the change happens without the conscious efforts of individuals or groups, and the other may be called "directed," or "guided," in that group planning and action leads to goals which, it is thought, will promote a happier, healthier, better educated, and independent society. All community development work, regardless of type, clearly falls in this second category.

Obviously, directed culture change is, in the broad sense, not new. Wars of conquest, economic development of societies and geographic regions, missionary activities, democratic community organization for civic ends, the efforts of the fathers of the American Revolution, all fall into this category. But, in recent years, certain types of guided culture change have swung into sharper focus. Though the term is now officially obsolete, "Point IV type programs" conveys the idea in fewest words. Regardless of sponsorship, the thought is that through a combination of outside and self help the economic and emotional security of those people of the lower social and income strata, wherever they may live, may be advanced. The problems often are more acute in those countries of slight economic development, as contrasted with the more highly industrialized areas, but the question seems to be one of degree and not of kind. One of the most interesting facts to develop from the discussion group was that the problems—and the means of attacking them—that applied to foreign countries were believed by those who had worked principally in the United States to reflect local situations to a surprising extent. That is, the rules for successful work in, let us say, Latin America, are also good rules to apply in the United States.

A particularly difficult question underlying directed culture change programs is that of "values." Who determines the needs and rights of a people? Who decides what is best, what should be done, what habits should be changed? In general, it was agreed that all such goals should be a function of the culture in question and not a reflection of the goals and attitudes of the outside countries sending the specialists. Though the discussion group considered the matter of values, for purposes of outlining rules of work, the question was begged. It was assumed that through research and careful thought, and through consultation and planning among all interested governments, goals could be determined which are consistent with the felt needs and aspirations of the people to be affected.

The problem then became one of determining the most practical methods to be used in field operations. There was general agreement that the 12 rules listed and discussed below, although not constituting an exhaustive list, seem to hold true in a majority of cases.

The 12 points suggested do not constitute a guide to any specific type of program—health, agriculture, or education. The list does not include all the things that the program planner and director should bear in mind, nor do all of the points necessarily apply in a given situation. Any specific problem must be thought of as a more or less unique phenomenon, although it will, of course, have much in common with other similar problems. Many of the general principles suggested here will apply, but they are no substitute in themselves for thorough and accurate community analysis before a program is completely planned and initiated.

1. *Know the culture in which work is to be done*

Since the idea behind directed culture change is to change or add to something already in existence, it is apparent that we must know what the "something" is before an attempt to change it is considered. There are, unfortunately, no short cuts to learning a culture. It is work that takes time and patience. And, in most cases, it is best done by a trained cultural anthropologist or sociologist who is familiar with the projected action goals and who bears in mind the data needs of the administrator but who, nevertheless, ideally works toward a full picture of the culture. This is a point that is sometimes hard for the administrator to understand. The reason is that in the beginning it is often impossible to know what significant factors bear on any concrete project. An obscure point in the prestige complex of a people may, for example, hold the key to the successful introduction of pit privies; or the supernatural beliefs of a people with regard to seed corn may be the determining factor in preventing the introduction of a hybrid variety.

Although at the present time there is great need for thorough basic studies in all cultures, the problem of acquiring the necessary insight will become easier as time passes and knowledge is accumulated. Although each country, and

each village, is different in some ways from all others, nevertheless, all villages in an area and most countries in a region share a majority of their basic culture patterns. This means that when a series of selected studies has been completed it becomes possible to infer a great deal about the basic patterns in other unstudied areas; that is, the basic underlying patterns hold true over wide areas. Once these patterns are worked out, the research problem then becomes one, in any specific locality, of isolating the specific factors that are unique to the locality, and relating these factors, as well as the underlying patterns, to the immediate project.

For example, cultural anthropologists and rural sociologists have, over the past 25 years, made a series of basic studies of contemporary Latin American culture. Although the picture is far from complete, enough of the basic patterns have been isolated so that when a specific project was outlined it was possible to acquire significant data in a surprisingly short time because the field workers built on the accumulated scientific capital of 25 years of work. Hence, if we are correct in assuming that directed culture change programs are just beginning a period of enormous expansion, it is particularly important to urge that active support be given to long-range basic cultural analyses.

2. *Select the site of operations with extreme care*

Paradoxical as it may sound, at this stage of our knowledge it is usually wise to select a community which, through past progress and a progressive spirit, gives indications of future progress. All too often, program sites have been selected on the basis of the absolute poverty of a people, of their crying need for help. To select communities that are somewhat better off, it is argued, would reflect a fundamental disregard for humanitarian principles. Communities in all parts of the world tend to fall into progressive and conservative categories. The factors that underlie these differences are not well understood, but it does not take extensive investigation to determine, in any locality, the order of rating of all groups. Usually, the people of a community know where they themselves fall. Factors which may often underlie a progressive community, and which

therefore make it a favorable one in which to commence work, include a relative lack of social cleavages, a reasonably stable economic basis, the characteristics of a population that is not too marked by transients or one in which political dissensions are not extreme, and so forth.

So little is known about the requirements for successful directed culture change that failure may result, even under apparently ideal circumstances. Too many otherwise sound projects have been doomed to failure before they were begun simply because the most difficult site possible was selected. Once a certain success has been obtained in a community, once the confidence of field personnel to cope with the local situation is established, once the specific problems of operation of a given locality are solved, then it is possible to work in the socially and economically more retarded communities. Often the successful example of a progressive village will spell the difference between success and failure in adjacent neighborhoods.

3. *Pay first attention to selection of the program staff*

The delegating of authority to individuals temperamentally and scientifically unsuited to the work they are to perform has caused as many failures, perhaps, as any other single factor. It is better not to start a program than to attempt to push it through with unsuitable personnel. Perhaps failure to pay adequate salaries is the biggest single shortcoming in selection of personnel. Reasonably high pay is essential for at least two reasons: to attract persons of sufficient education and intelligence to understand thoroughly the problems involved; and to give personnel sufficient prestige and status within their own bureaucratic organization so that they identify themselves with the goals of top level management, rather than letting them feel that they are underpaid and unesteemed flunkies. Personnel must command the respect equally of their superiors and of the people among whom they work.

4. *Regardless of long-range hopes, start with a simple project that shows obvious results in a short time*

It is difficult, if not impossible, to maintain unflagging enthusiasm on the part of local peo-

ple if results are not quickly apparent to them. The local leaders who identify themselves with a new program, and who push it among their fellows, threaten their own position in the community when they cannot demonstrate results within a reasonable time. Frequently, the best local cooperators have been lost, and perhaps their active opposition has been incurred, simply because results could not be shown or perhaps because outside promised aid, on which they counted, was slow in making its appearance.

It is quite legitimate to use "bait" projects if necessary—projects not directly associated with long-range goals, but which represent felt needs of the people and which arouse their interest. Whatever the initial projects, avoid those heavily charged with emotional factors. Since the emotional charge varies enormously from culture to culture, it is apparent that sound basic knowledge of the local group is essential to avoid possible mistakes here.

5. *Take advantage of the pragmatic nature of people*

This rule is closely related to the preceding one. The most striking fact to emerge in recent studies of directed culture change is that people are pragmatic to an unexpected extent. If with their own eyes they can see results that they recognize as beneficial to them, regardless of their understanding of the reason, regardless of tradition and superstition, regardless of factors that might otherwise cause them to hold back, most people will give up the old and adopt the new. The problem, of course, is the means of convincing people that something is beneficial to them.

In general, a striking demonstration of the new is a positive way of changing behavior. In some areas this is easy. Malaria and yaws control programs, for example, quickly convince. Smallpox control is more difficult to prove, since success is less spectacular. However, if a striking demonstration can be made in any area of culture, the confidences established in the innovators may often be utilized to effect changes in areas where demonstration is difficult, if not impossible. Or, in other words, proof in one area will lead people to take other statements on faith—faith that would not

be forthcoming without the original demonstration.

In one South American city, for example, the visual success of an emergency whooping cough inoculation program in stemming a threatened epidemic was sufficient to assure the active cooperation of mothers in a subsequent BCG tuberculosis campaign.

But simple, unspectacular demonstrations are also important in many projects. To illustrate: If it is desired to introduce a new food, it is essential to show by demonstration all the steps in its preparation. Food and its preparation diffuse as a unit. It is not sufficient to give people the new food and expect them to cook it according to one of their traditional ways.

6. *Don't ask people to do anything they fear may threaten their already narrow margin of material security*

The poorest farmer is not the one who will first try an improved seed, no matter how desperate his need. However precarious his situation, from past experience he at least knows the dangers and limitations inherent in his traditional methods; he knows what to expect and can lay his plans accordingly. He is not apt to risk this narrow, but predictable, margin of known security by taking a chance on the say-so of an outside stranger. The poorest and busiest mother with the most sickly children is not the one who can afford to stand in line long hours in a health clinic to have a child examined. In general, most progress will be made if a target group is selected that lies somewhere between the lowest and highest extremes of social and economic status. Once progress is demonstrated with this target group, the obvious benefits will diffuse both upward and downward.

7. *Think in terms of the economic and social potential of the community—not in terms of an ideal program*

In the long run, any new program will have to be carried in large measure by the people themselves. Overplanning, in the sense of the "best" program for, let us say, a small rural center, may burden its citizenry with economic and maintenance commitments which would only be consistent with the growth of a prosperous industrial community.

8. Aim at integrated, broad programs

Insofar as is possible, it is usually advisable to think in terms of total community development rather than in terms of a single field of endeavor. In the first place, broadening a program spreads capital investment more widely, thus lowering unit costs. In the second place—and even more important—no type of project operates in a vacuum. A sound health program, as pointed out, depends on good agriculture, education, honest and efficient civic government, and an economic surplus. Good farming depends on healthy and informed workers, and good government requires all of these underlying factors, and many more. There are, admittedly, many practical problems that interpose themselves between the desire for a broad program and its realization; and special local situations will sometimes mean that it is impossible or unnecessary to conduct a program on a broad basis. Nevertheless, as a general goal, this aim seems valid.

9. Follow the right sequence in a program

All community programs represent continuums in time. Each project of a major program must be adapted both to the other projects and to the general cultural setting, not only as of a given date, but also in terms of time depth. When the factors that bear on the relationship of a given project to other projects, and to the culture at large, are known, then its place in the sequence of projects can be better determined. For example, reading rooms and books should not be introduced into a community until such time as the ability to read has become an accepted value by at least a significant part of the group and until this part is clamoring for knowledge. Or again, undue stress on preventive medicine in public health programs will meet with little success until the immediate felt need of curative medicine is at least partially satisfied.

10. Use existing community leadership whenever possible

In general, the evidence indicates that existing community leaders working through existing community institutions, such as church, government, school associations of fathers or mothers, and the like, constitute the most effective way to get action. Individuals who are poorly adjusted to their own cultures and whose discontent often quickly brings them to the side of outside innovators, will not, in most cases, be leaders who can aid a project. It is important to recognize the distinction between formal and informal patterns of leadership. Both patterns have their place in community development. Unfortunately, our knowledge of the structure of leadership in many parts of the world is rudimentary and much research on this problem seems indicated.

11. Avoid local commitments against a project

Every effort should be made to obtain the cooperation of as many people as possible before they go on record as opposing the project. There are almost always people in each community who are only too anxious to express themselves negatively, particularly if their advice has not been asked. Once committed publicly against a project, it is very difficult for them to change their stand, since it will mean a possible loss of "face." If positive cooperation cannot be elicited, at least try to promote a neutral attitude.

12. Require payment for certain services

A great deal of evidence suggests the wisdom of charging at least a token sum for many types of health, agricultural, and educational services. In many parts of the world, the fact that something is given away carries a strong implication of worthlessness. Even a small payment, adjusted to the ability of the recipient to pay, will often create an awareness of value and will elicit cooperation, where the same service or item given free would be ignored or thrown away. To illustrate: In an agricultural extension program in a South American country, it was found that if fruit trees were given to farmers, the farmers usually failed to plant them. When a small charge was made for the same trees, the farmers' interest was heightened, more trees were planted and cared for, and the overall results were more satisfactory.

REFERENCE

(1) Linton, R.: The cultural background of personality. New York, N. Y., Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1945, p. 32.