

**GATEKEEPER SERIES No. 75**

**Lessons for the large-scale  
application of process  
approaches from Sri Lanka**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The process approach to the planning and management of development initiatives is being taken up by many donor and recipient agencies, yet there remains some lack of clarity over the exact meaning of the term. Also, over ten years after the approach was first advocated by North American academics there has been no comprehensive review of the operationalisation of the approach. This paper summarises both of these tasks based on a study of the first decade of a process programme. The study compared the theoretical aspects of a process approach (such as flexibility, learning and participation, and to a lesser extent aspects concerning the institutional environment and internal management) with the experiences of a Sri Lankan integrated rural development programme. The lessons learned may be of more general application.

Firstly, it would appear that a process approach can lead to effective development interventions and that these are not the preserve of NGOs operating on a small-scale. In this case a government agency working through bureaucratic and poorly-resourced line agencies was the major vehicle. Secondly the greater use of process is more complex and requires more intensive management than conventional blueprint approaches. This complexity is derived from the logistics of participation; the simultaneous handling of many small-scale projects through all stages of the project cycle; from the move to multi-actor situations with capacity-building objectives and from the need to build-in learning mechanisms.

Other lessons include the need to provide strategic management for these long-term programmes in order to preserve the character and direction and also to avoid negative consequences of the freedom that flexibility provides. There is also a need for comprehensive and formal learning mechanisms as learning is at the heart of these approaches. Such mechanisms are based round improved monitoring systems and the free and regular use of joint internal/external reviews rather than evaluations.

The overall conclusions of this study are that:

- Integrated rural development programmes taking a process approach can work.
- To be successful, it is necessary to manage complexity and uncertainty with complexity and flexibility.
- There is no 'either/or' with process and blueprint approaches. A good programme will consider mixes of the two according to the situation.
- Contrary to previous thinking, process approaches are management intensive. The logistics within a large multi-sectoral programme of introducing broad participation, co-ordinating activities of multiple sectoral agencies and scheduling action learning cycles demands effective management.

# LESSONS FOR THE LARGE-SCALE APPLICATION OF PROCESS APPROACHES FROM SRI LANKA

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Richard Bond

## Introduction

Process approaches to rural development are now being used extensively. A process approach emphasises experimenting, learning, adapting and slowly expanding activities in a participatory and flexible way, building local capabilities as the project proceeds. It gives much less emphasis to the rigid confines of the project cycle, typical of a blueprint approach. This paper considers a decade of experience from Sri Lanka where the national Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) has evolved from classic blueprint to process approaches. The outcome so far has been considered to be successful, but there have been significant problems with the complexity of such an approach. This paper examines how the process methods were operationalised within a typical, donor supported, government implemented, district level IRDP. The lessons learned, however, have more universal application.

## Process approaches: a voyage of discovery

*“The term “implementation” understates the complexity of the task of carrying out projects that are affected by a high degree of initial ignorance and uncertainty. Here “project implementation” may often mean in fact a long voyage of discovery in the most varied domains, from technology to politics”. Hirschman, 1967 (Author’s emphasis)*

The process approach to development has several origins. However, all stemmed from concern about the poor performance of development projects which took a ‘blueprint’, top-down approach to development. The blueprint approach is based within the concepts of rationality and reductionism. Prescribed steps define the stages of the project cycle; experts design and control; detailed planning at the beginning specifies objectives, targets, outputs, resources and schedules; local institutions are bypassed if they have inadequate capacity and the job of management is to implement as closely as possible to the plan.

The process approach has evolved as a reaction to the ineffectiveness of blueprint in diverse complex environments. Through this approach it is accepted that many things are unknown at the start; problem-solving capacities and local institutions are built-up; experimentation takes place and error is embraced; beneficiaries participate in flexible incremental adaptation; and the whole programme starts small and grows.

Amongst those who advocate process approaches as the best way forward, there are two main schools of thought. The purists of participation and learning argue for the

abandonment of the concept of 'project' (largely Korten, 1980 & Chambers, 1993) and see process as synonymous with local institutional development. The managerialists still see a big role for outsiders and argue that projects, managers and management systems must be more flexible and adaptive (Sweet and Weisel, 1979; Rondinelli, 1983; 1993; Brinkerhoff, 1992). I have reviewed the literature on process approaches (Bond 1997) to understand its main elements and to measure the theory against a real programme (MONDEP). The aim was to establish where that programme fits into the theoretical framework.

## The elements of a process approach

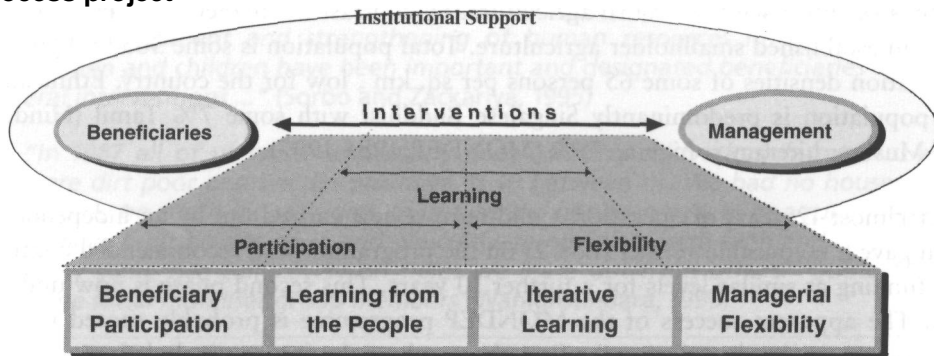
From the review of the literature, the following are the common ingredients, in theory, of a process approach:

- 1 Flexible, phased implementation**
  - To start small and expand
  - Longer time frame
  - Experimental approach
  - For action-learning
  
- 2 Learning from experience**
  - Embracing error
  - Links between implementation and planning
  - Iterative improvement of small interventions
  - To be effective, efficient and to expand
  - Appropriate technologies
  
- 3 Beneficiary participation**
  - In explaining social context
  - In problem analysis
  - In planning and decision-making
  - In resource mobilisation and implementation
  - In monitoring and evaluation
  - Empowerment of beneficiaries
  
- 4 Institutional support**
  - Political support
  - Devolved authority
  - Use of permanent institutions
  - Local capacity building
  - Organisational change
  - Facilitating beneficiary organisation
  
- 5 Programme management**
  - Well qualified and motivated leadership
  - New professionalism
  - Stability and continuity of key staff
  - Variety of short-term technical assistance

Long-term technical assistance in a facilitating role to avoid dependency  
 Project management unit with flexible, informal approach  
 Creative management  
 Good co-ordination between the many agencies and groups involved

This summary is represented in Box 1.

**Box 1. Interrelationship of the main characteristics of interventions in a process project**



In the above diagram, process defines relationships between the beneficiaries and the management, not in an abstract, conceptual way, but through the activities of specific interventions. The diagram therefore links beneficiaries to management by interventions. The spectrum of characteristics of the interventions connects the three main elements of process directly relevant to that relationship; participation, learning and flexibility. These characteristics overlap; participation is required of the beneficiaries, flexibility is required of the management and learning links the two, overlapping as shown. This gives a spectrum of four distinct characteristics; beneficiary participation, learning from the people, iterative learning and managerial flexibility. Institutional support relates to the environment containing both management, beneficiaries and the interventions. Internal managerial aspects of process lie within the circle of management.

## Learning from MONDEP as a process programme

*“The most serious problems lie, not in the Grand Design, but in what has the superficial appearance of ‘details’” A. Sen (1975)*

Sri Lanka’s Moneragala Integrated Rural Development Programme (MONDEP) started in 1984, the 11th IRDP under the National Programme of the then Ministry of Policy, Planning and Implementation (MPPI). The main objective of the National Programme was to bring development to districts by-passed by earlier national lead projects. It was supported by grant assistance from the Norwegian Agency for Development Co-operation (NORAD), a commitment which has been long-term, non-interfering, flexible, and supportive. MPPI also encouraged a degree of experimentation and autonomy within the

national programme.

MONDEP covers the second largest district in Sri Lanka; probably the most severely disadvantaged outside the civil war zone. It covers some 5,600 sq. km, is landlocked and its predominantly flat to gently undulating land rises to a mountainous boundary in the north-west. Annual rainfall varies between 1,000 and 2,500 mm and is seasonal to bi-modal. There is a high proportion of natural forest for the country but in-migration over recent decades has seen a substantial reduction in forest as pioneer farmers establish slash and burn agriculture. By contrast the higher and wetter zones have an established smallholder agriculture. Total population is some 365,000 giving population densities of some 65 persons per sq. km, low for the country. Ethnically the population is predominantly Singalese Buddhist with some 7% Tamil (Hindu) and Muslim. Literacy is high at 75% (MONDEP, 1985-1997).

After almost 12 years of operation a mid-term review carried out by an independent team gave a favourable verdict (Box 2) on the programme and recommended continued funding at similar levels for a further 10 years. This second phase is now underway. The apparent success of the MONDEP programme is probably rooted in the process approach taken during the first phase, where the features included:

- a 20-year time frame with rolling planning and built-in review mechanisms;
- a direct poverty focus for many projects, aimed at marginalised farmers and encroachers, estate workers, unemployed youth and rural women;
- involvement of target groups in participatory planning approaches and social mobilisation;
- supporting and building the capacity of local institutions, rather than by-passing them.

## How does MONDEP in practice fit with process in theory?

How closely does the experience of the first decade of MONDEP fit to the process theory? The closeness of fit was rated on a scale of 'poor', 'some', 'moderate', 'good', and 'very good' fit (Bond, 1997). All aspects came out as moderate or above in fit with 'learning from experience' ranking lowest. The best fit was 'beneficiary participation' which is a key element of the programme. Although the method used needs to be treated with caution, it appears that although not all elements of process theory fit well with the MONDEP programme, all the main aspects have been used in the programme and the claim that MONDEP has followed process approaches is well founded. What then can be learned from the experience of a decade of operation, and why were some aspects easier to apply than others?

## **Box 2. Judging MONDEP a success**

Evidence for the 'success' of the programme after its first decade is more a matter of consensus and circumstantial, rather than direct, evidence. This evidence comes from various sources, such as an independent mid-term review, opinions of beneficiaries, donors and officials, an independent report of a commissioned development journalist, and 22 reviews of projects within the programme. Individually perhaps, none of these would 'stand up in court', there is no single, quantitative indicator to reflect programme impact of a multi-sectoral, district-wide and long-term programme. There has not been a census for 16 years and other district-level aggregate indicators should be treated with caution due to unreliability and external macro effects.

Nevertheless, and in spite of a high level of internal self-criticism evident particularly in the 22 reviews, a general picture of success does emerge, a few brief samples of these are given below.

*"The governments of Sri Lanka and Norway may be justifiably proud of MONDEP ... the evidence available on the distribution and the effectiveness of MONDEP investments indicates that the project has had a positive impact in reducing poverty and increasing welfare in the district"* (Moore et al., 1995).

*"The programme has been able to bring direct benefits to large numbers of beneficiaries in the form of community facilities ... as well as household facilities ... which provides new opportunities for local populations and which assist the development and strengthening of human resources in the district ... Women and children have been important and designated beneficiaries of several interventions ..."* (Sorbo and Zackariya, 1995)

*"In 1987 all of us were desperately poor (shifting cultivation) farmers ... we were dirt poor and we did not have Rs 10 between us. We had no houses, no savings, no credit, no subsidies. In fact we did not have a plate or a cup. ... All of us have built houses now, and we cultivate our plots with highland crops and grow some rice collectively on fields we lease out from others"* Quote from some social mobiliser group members (Wanigasundara, 1995)

A number of conceptual and practical lessons can be learned from the experience of this process programme, some of which are detailed below.

### **The institutional setting**

MONDEP is one of some 16 district-based IRDPs administered under the Regional Development Division of the Ministry of Planning, Ethnic Affairs and National Integration. The RDD as the aid recipient and responsible agency has overseen an evolution in approaches to IRDPs, learning informally and willing to experiment with different approaches. While causing administrative and monitoring difficulties, this has ensured that Sri Lanka has been at the cutting edge of IRDP evolution. RDD allows a relatively high degree of operational autonomy to the IRDPs, but still maintains control of budgets and personnel.



## **Flexibility**

Since process programmes depend, by definition, on their ability to be flexible and adopt new projects and ideas as they arise, how can this flexibility be achieved in such a large programme?

In MONDEP, the key to maintaining flexibility is through the programme planning procedure. The Project Director presents an annual programme for the following year at the end of the first quarter. This includes a work programme and budget, plus sketches of any new projects proposed. These sketches and budgets are approved in principle by the donor and relevant ministry. Thus MONDEP moves forward a year at a time within the overall objectives of the programme. The approved sketches can be planned in detail and finally approved at any time, with some sketches waiting years to be planned or dropped altogether if not deemed appropriate. The project can implement these plans at any time also. This is the basic rolling planning framework which enables the process approach. However, it does create particular budgeting and management problems.

For example, the rolling planning system means that all stages of the project cycle will be active simultaneously among many small projects. This complex situation requires different accounting systems to more conventional, blueprint programmes. In the latter, plans and budgets are estimated for the (relatively short) lifetime of the project, and expenditure is monitored as the commitment is steadily discharged. With a process approach, auditing systems need to be able to cope with the fact that activities are continually planned, implemented, reviewed and modified throughout the relatively long (10-20 years) life of the project. Thus compatibility must be ensured between capacity, available finance and duration of planned activities and to ensure that spare financial capacity is reserved for future plans. This capacity was missing in the first phase of MONDEP. The enthusiasm with which new commitments and plans were made, in the absence of a definition of the acceptable limit of commitments which could be made, caused many problems.

Given these limitations, a long-term process programme with a rolling planning system should ideally undergo three phases of implementation:

- *An initial capacity build-up:* the agencies of the district are introduced to the approaches and objectives of the programme, and their planning and implementation capacities are slowly built-up through a series of small experimental projects. This phase also requires special projects to establish and support the functioning of the Project Management Unit (PMU) and to give material support to the key agencies. Social mobilisation should be introduced early into areas of concentration of target groups where projects are active.
- *Sustainable process phase:* This is the main phase of the programme and should maintain a stable level of commitments, made up of projects of increasing size, which can be discharged in a reasonably short period.
- *The phase-out:* In this phase, no new initiatives are taken on except for a few essential small-scale specialised projects to ease the transfer of all programme functions to permanent institutions or provide final consolidation to former investments. A well planned phase-out should allow the removal of the PMU and special donor support

without harming the continual development of the area by (now improved) state, commercial and civil institutions.

The rolling planning structures need to be reflected in the budgetary procedures, since budgets are financial plans. This often means educating higher-level financial managers (generally accountants rather than planners) about the objectives and consequences of rolling plans.

Much of the above was not clearly understood at the beginning of MONDEP and so there was only a moderate fit in terms of experimental approach and phasing. The rolling planning structures and long time frame provided a much better fit with process theory. Overall, flexible phased implementation rated a 'good' fit.

### **Learning**

The ability to review experience and build in the learning into future plans is an essential part of a process approach. Learning in a process programme has to be more than just an academic exercise. The learning has to feed back into the planning of future phases.

The MONDEP programme is clearly justified in claiming that it has followed a learning process approach: "*the project management has displayed considerable flexibility and innovativeness, and changed programmes, policies and strategies in response to experience*" (Moore et al., 1995). Learning has happened in both informal and formal ways. Informal learning tends to be built up amongst staff members as their experience with the project grows. This type of learning therefore depends on the continuity of staff, which contributes to the build-up of institutional memory.

Informal learning is certainly not foolproof, nor sufficient, so formal learning needs also to be incorporated in the form of regular reviews. Small review teams comprising a mix of internal and external personnel but including someone from each of the involved agencies is a good combination. Also, using rapid participatory appraisal techniques triangulated with a minimum of formal methods can provide reliable learning quickly, and cost-effectively.

MONDEP had informal learning in the early years reliant on a stable staff and ensuring both continuity and institutional memory. In later years formal reviews took place on a regular basis but staff continuity declined. This enabled a comparison of the two methods. Evidence was found for the necessity of formal reviews where flawed approaches were being perpetuated; the formal review helped to reveal the weaknesses. Evidence was also found for the need to involve staff of implementing agencies in the review process in order to ensure the incorporation of findings into the policy and planning processes. An illustration is given on the following page based on three recent reviews:

<i>Review</i>	<i>Team participation by line agency</i>	<i>Communication of findings to line agency</i>	<i>Results observed</i>
Rain-fed Highland Farming Stabilisation Projects, 1994	No institutional representation on the team	There was a pre-publication check of the draft by the head of the line agency. There was no presentation of the review findings to line agency staff. Copies of the report were sent to senior staff	Two years later, the weaknesses identified in the review were still being practised by the line agency under programme funded projects
District Educational Services Projects 1995	Retiring officer of line agency on the team	Copies of the report were sent and a presentation of review findings were made to senior staff of the line agency	Findings incorporated in the joint planning of the next project phase and in provincial policy formulation
Primary Health Care Projects, 1996	Two senior staff of line agency on the team as consultant and fieldworker	Team member from the line agency distributed copies of the report; presented findings to agency staff; noted points 'for action'	Top Ministry official appreciates the study, has sent copies to WHO and put it forward as a model. Provincial government informed and action initiated on three important points

These cases imply that increasing involvement of partner agencies in the evaluation process has brought about increasing adoption and use of the lessons learned. However without the initiative from Project Office backed by budgets and staff no such reviews would have taken place at all.

To ensure the adoption and application of lessons learned requires not only procedures but also the scheduling of learning activities so that lessons learned come at the right time to be absorbed into the next planning stage. In simple terms, the system should ensure that the officer responsible for planning has access to and has read the relevant review reports. Even so, when lessons learned have been read in time for planning, courage and imagination are required to make the often radical changes needed. Even when lessons learned are not controversial or challenging, the power of inertia should not be underestimated. A corporate culture deliberately fostered to openly embrace error, to take risks and to reward imagination and innovation is needed. This requires human resource management approaches based on enabling, rather than controlling, professional staff. For example, the evolution of the participatory planning model outlined in the next section, involved a year long process of critical reflection, innovation and consensus among project and other agency staff. Although the former model was popular, well known and had been used for

eight years on nine projects, the project office was able to manage this necessary process of change.

Learning from experience only rated a 'moderate' fit. The Korten (1980) model of achieving effectiveness, efficiency and expansion was not formally incorporated and there were too many large interventions which did not undergo iterative improvements from small experiments. However, there was a good fit with other elements of the theory including self-critical reviews; links between learning and planning; and use of appropriate technologies.

## Participation

There are two aspects to participation in MONDEP:

- People's participation at various stages in programme activities and initiatives; and
- Institutional participation in the programme, since MONDEP relies heavily on local institutions.

### **People's participation**

Participation has many benefits both in terms of project outcome and as a process of empowerment. However, issues of scale and logistics demand careful analysis. While a high degree of participation can be organised at a local scale among a significant proportion of people and even including the marginalised, participation on a larger scale necessarily entails nominal representation and the likely loss of minority voices and diversity.

For long-term participation in the development process and empowerment, social organisation and mobilisation are necessary. If begun at the start of the project this will be extremely useful for the organisation of participatory planning of projects and subsequent involvement with implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

In MONDEP participatory planning evolved over the decade from a consultative model combining bottom-up with top-down planning for sub-district area development projects to a fully participatory demand-led model for local area (600 family) planning. Although these approaches to planning take longer than group discussions, they can be facilitated by mixed groups of trained government employees and volunteers from the beneficiary community, thus reducing expensive staff time and improving effectiveness through a balance of professional and local knowledge. There are further long-term benefits to using PRA, such as:

- The enthusiasm of beneficiaries involved, if harnessed quickly by further involvement in the development process and by responding with speedy support can create a sense of ownership amongst beneficiaries
- The changes in attitudes and approach of government officials is notable and can influence organisational culture.

MONDEP's experience shows that intensive participatory approaches such as PRA are possible on a wide scale with government programmes. While high levels of methodological 'purity' were not achieved, the primary objectives of broad-based participation and a degree of analysis and democratically-voiced preferences for joint community/state action were achieved. Some relevant indicators from a series of 23 PRA village planning sessions were average daily attendance of 72 (about a quarter of the adult population of the surrounding area); of which 45% were men and 55% women. Typical outputs were two group discussions, one map, 15 thematic charts, male and female seasonal calendars, a wealth ranking, a transect walk, two Venn diagrams and a ranked list of community initiatives, requiring some support. These can be seen as indirect indicators of a significant degree of analysis and negotiation.

Time management of participation is vital as both participatory methodologies (e.g. Participatory Rural Appraisal) build-up hopes and harness social dynamism which demand a fast response, and participatory processes themselves can take time while confidence is built and conflicts resolved, demanding flexibility in managerial response.

PRA methods do need to be fully incorporated into planning and evaluation systems as an appropriate technique (among others) at certain times and places. This requires logistical and managerial support. In MONDEP, some 'hard' methodologies such as critical path analysis techniques typical of major engineering works, where complex sequences of activities are logically linked and scheduled, were found to be useful for managing these 'soft' methodologies.

Beneficiary participation in MONDEP had a good fit with theory especially in terms of understanding the social context. There was a good fit also with participation in problem analysis and planning as well as with empowerment of beneficiary groups. Participation in implementation was variable and in monitoring was only moderate.

### **Institutional participation**

Involving local institutions in the programme, and the capacity-building that entails is essential if the activities are to be sustained beyond the life of the actual programme. This required a long time frame and the acceptance that most programme activities will involve negotiation and partnership with various autonomous agencies rather than lying within the authority of the Project Director (Smith et.al., 1981). The long-term (beyond the life of the project) co-ordination of development activities will depend on the existence and capacity of a permanent planning unit. Thus the existence of the IRDP's PMU may undermine the development of such a permanent institution unless it is located within such a permanent institution from the start.

## **Differences in stakeholders between conventional and process projects**

Comparing the experiences of MONDEP with a conventional (blueprint) programme – The Mahaweli Development Programme Downstream Developments – shows how the power or influence over outcomes and the importance to project objectives of various stakeholder groups changes with the different approaches:

<i>Change from blueprint to process</i>	<i>Justification</i>
Reduction in power of donor agency	Donor policy of recipient responsibility in MONDEP fitted well with process theory and allowed control of the development process with notable flexibility by the recipient. In the conventional project, donor retains influence through the agreed plan (which allows for little flexibility) and the reimbursement mechanism which acts as a sanction
Reduction in importance to the programme of the recipient agency	Relative autonomy of the PMU from the recipient agency over planning and methodology compared to the highly centralised structures of the Mahaweli Programme
Increase in power and importance of the local administration	While Mahaweli bypassed the local administration, MONDEP used the devolution to build up the local administration and to hand over responsibility
Decrease in power and importance of national line agencies	National line agencies had a key role in the Mahaweli programme but MONDEP used the local offices (under a devolved administration) of line agencies among other agencies
Increase in importance of local NGOs	NGOs were not encouraged in the Mahaweli programme, but were indirectly supported under MONDEP
Increase in importance of local political leadership	In the Mahaweli programme local political leaders were subservient to national leadership and had no say in running the programme beyond low-level appointments. In MONDEP they are involved in the planning process on many projects and are kept informed of programme objectives. They also seek (and sometimes succeed) to influence investments and contracts
Increase in power and influence of target group beneficiaries	Through a high degree of participation in many of the MONDEP projects they have a considerable influence on investments. They are more important because most investments depend on their co-operation and participation, while in Mahaweli the settlers were seen as an input among major infrastructural investments and had little voice

## Political/donor support

Donor support has been crucial to the programme in both quantity and quality. MONDEP was grant supported for some 95% of programme costs over a 20-year time frame. Such a

time-frame is rare in aid institutions, yet is vital to process programmes. In terms of quality, the ‘back-seat’ philosophy of NORAD is clearly enlight-ened, and helps to build responsible institutions rather than creating dependency. However, political support for the programme, whether at international (donor country) or national levels, should not be taken for granted. Political support depends on the mood of the electorate, and in the case of MONDEP, the sophisti-cated electorate of the donor country (Norway) often challenged their leadership on development assistance issues which translated into requests to the programme for evidence of success.

Within the local area, too, managing relations with political leaders is time consuming and complicated, but must be a priority task for programme managers.

## Administrative decentralisation

The establishment of a major district IRDP in many ways is itself an act of decentralisation, by placing a well-resourced and co-ordinating function at district level. However, if these positive functions are to continue beyond the life of the IRDP, then they will need to be transferred to some part of the devolved administration. Through MONDEP’s Divisional-Level Planning Support Project, significant transfers of capacity were made to a sub-district administrative level. Unfortunately, these Divisional Secretariats were deconcentrated arms of central government, not the democratically accountable local authorities which were considered as being too weak.

In terms of institutional support the programme had a very good fit with process theory in terms of devolved authority, the involvement of permanent institutions and building local capacities. There was only a moderate fit with other elements including involving the support of local politicians and using existing organisations neither of which had the needs of the poorest at heart. The initiation of internal organisational change among local agencies rated a poor fit and was considered beyond the remit of the programme.

Overall the internal management aspects of the programme rated a moderate to good fit with the theory, strongest fit being in terms of leadership and use of technical assistance and the flexibility of the PMU. The weakest fit concerned the loss of staff stability after the first eight years and the slow uptake of the concepts of ‘new professionalism’ in the various line agencies.

## Blueprint and process: can they be combined?

Although the two approaches are opposite in their philosophies, mixes of the two ideological extremes are probably closer to reality. Certainly the simple dichotomy of blueprint or process is not the only option available to programme designers:

- **Blueprint THEN process:** A programme could be designed to have a blueprint approach for a few years to establish quickly and efficiently improved infrastructure, necessary for the functioning of basic services and production. Then this could be followed by a long-term programme to work with the people of the area in experimenting and developing ways to improve livelihoods.

- **Process THEN blueprint:** The opposite of the above, using process experimentation to establish the most effective approaches to solving local problems then mainstreaming the solutions using classic blueprint methods. The proposed new project cycle for the World Bank (Picciotto and Weaving, 1994) and even the learning process of Korten could fall into this option.
- **Blueprint/process CONTINUUM:** This would see elements of both blueprint and process approaches as independent and belonging to the same toolbox to be used as appropriate to the situation. A continuum of mixed elements somewhere between the two approaches would therefore exist.
- **Blueprint IN process:** Here a process approach is adopted for a programme but the resultant component projects resemble classic blueprints. It could be argued that Phase 1 of the MONDEP programme with rolling participatory planning and learning from phased experience of discreet blueprint projects falls within this category.
- **Process IN blueprint:** Here a programme is bound by a predetermined set of objectives or plan but only to a broad level of detail. Within this, a great deal of flexibility and learning can take place. This is the ‘structured flexibility’ of Brinkerhoff and Ingle (1989), it may also describe the second phase of the MONDEP programme where donor concerns for a ‘tight’ logframe to maintain pre-defined objectives focuses the freedom of process.

Although MONDEP reflects the nature of a process programme, it is perhaps more accurately described as a mix of both blueprint and process characteristics. In the first phase, the programme followed a process approach while many individual projects could be seen as blueprint plans. This would fit the concept of Blueprint IN Process. The second phase, started in 1996, would perhaps be closer to the Process IN Blueprint concept, with much more tightly defined objectives and structure for a finite budget, while leaving most of the detail for further experimentation and learning.

## Conclusions

MONDEP’s experience has demonstrated that process approaches can be followed by a government bureaucracy on a large scale. Process, therefore, is not the unique preserve of small projects managed by NGOs. It also seems that while success in rural development initiatives is both elusive and difficult to prove, process approaches have led to a notable measure of success in the MONDEP programme. These general observations lead to several conclusions:

- Integrated rural development programmes can work. The ‘second generation’ IRDPs which follow process approaches can perform dramatically better than the blueprint models from which they evolved. Too much debate has focused on ‘what is integrated?’. The point is that initiatives which are not integrated (ie single sector projects or programmes), whatever their merits, are not rural development, but merely contribute to an aspect of rural development, and are likely ultimately to fail in their broader rural development objectives due to external factors



- MONDEP demonstrates that it is reasonable to advocate the management of complexity and uncertainty with complexity and flexibility. The experience shows that this is possible in one of the remotest and most disadvantaged areas of Sri Lanka<sup>1</sup>.
- A process approach is not just a straight alternative to the conventional blueprint approach. A good programme design will consider mixes of the two according to the situation. Consideration of these options in the programme design stage will help to clarify thinking about the most effective way of achieving objectives and the necessary institutional arrangements.
- Process approaches are management intensive. This goes in the face of the implications of the 1980s writing on the subject (Korten, 1980; Rondinelli, 1983; 1993), which claimed that tight management of projects was part of the problem, and that projects had to be freed up from the rigid planning and management techniques current in engineering and logistics. Some interpretations of this led to overly-free management styles, often interpreted as abandoning management altogether. The folly of this becomes clear in a large multi-sectoral programme where the logistics of introducing broad participation, co-ordinating activities of multiple sectoral agencies and scheduling action learning cycles demands effective management.

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1. However, this conclusion may not extend to other remote and disadvantaged situations (after all Sri Lanka enjoys better social indicators than its economic indicators would imply).

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