

## Networking for a Sustainable Future: The Case of Development Agencies

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### Abstract

Globalisation as the fulfilment of a long-term promise of western rationality and its corresponding management ideal dominates. Nevertheless, it is certainly not a homogeneous and coherent process. Most localities incorporate a diversity of economic and political strategies as a way to both negotiate global forces and maintain a certain degree of internal cohesion. Development Agencies (DAs) have been set up in the European context with the mandate of supporting actors and agencies as well as assisting long-term development planning on a local/regional level. Despite different set-ups and modes of operation, DAs have the potential to contribute substantially to the quest for sustainability in rural Europe. Through a general overview of EU DAs and a case study of a Greek DA, both strengths and weaknesses are delineated thus providing the stimulus for a discussion of the nature of organisations which may have an impact on the effective management of change in the rural environment.

### Introduction

The precise nature of the improvements that constitute development is essentially contested. The ideological context of development is dependent upon one's personal and ideological standpoint. Since the 1960s there is a questioning of whether the goal of economic growth is part of the solution or part of the problem of what has been labelled as 'maldevelopment'.<sup>22</sup> Nowadays, financial globalisation boosts economic globalisation, as well as the free-market ideology of liberalisation, deregulation and privatisation. For many the 'great success story' of globalised production has led to a litany of social and ecological crises; conventional growth of enormous physical scale is bound to lead to increasing environmental damage and a breakdown in the social fabric.

Power (1997) asserts that "the goals of unlimited economic growth and preserving the planet for future generations ... are essentially incompatible". According to Daly (1997) "the term 'sustainable growth' when applied to the economy is a bad oxymoron"; unfortunately, "currently the term 'sustainable development' is used as a synonym for the oxymoronic sustainable growth". Suffice it to indicate at this point that sustainability, (like all the definitions of) development, is a complex, contested, constructed, and contextual concept. The many definitions of sustainability are a result of the fact that weighing up parameters

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<sup>22</sup> In 1969 Seers argued that development should strive towards the alleviation of poverty, unemployment and inequality; in 1997 Savio states that in the globalisation era the issues of accountability, equity and democracy have to be seriously addressed.

(i.e. social, ecological and economic parameters of systems, entities, or phenomena) will always be a matter for negotiations and trade-offs. So far, the advances in real terms (e.g. Agenda 21) are poor; the wide adoption, in rhetoric, of the term by circles of privilege and power indicates that the sine qua non thesis that "... more intra-generational equity is a condition for achieving inter-generational equity" (Sachs, 1997, p. 9), is not addressed - if equity and justice matter at all!

It seems, therefore, necessary to rethink development in order to find new visions and new directions for change. Theoretical debates on Beck's thesis of a 'world risk society' and critiques of ecomodernism (Lash et al., 1996), the constructivist ethos of sociology of science and technology (Jasanoff et al., 1995), along with questions related to local responses to globalisation (i.e. participation, innovation, management strategies etc) provide hints to such revision / redefinition of the development process.

### **Local Responses to Globalisation**

Local is the opposite of the global, being at the same time the victim of the global. In the globalisation era, schematically, business becomes global and reactions arise at the local level. Reactions are heterogeneous and fragmented; at times they take the form of fundamentalist movements. Caught between the global and the local, the nation-state is becoming eroded. Structural adjustment formulas allow for only one alternative: to cut services. Everything that is profitable will be of interest to TNCs; furthermore, in order to attract jobs and/or investments, the state has to subsidise their activities. The public sector is left to address the social and the ecological consequences of globalisation. Traditional politics are increasingly delegitimized and the people's political power also declines (Finger, 1997).<sup>23</sup>

Under such circumstances, localities put forward their own diversities; they adopt new survival strategies and functions. One, among many, strategic responses refer to the establishment of Development Agencies (DAs).

### **Development Agencies**

Within a framework such as the one presented above new parameters such as technology, information, human resources and participation to development, co-ordination of efforts etc. define the pace of development along with capital, labour and natural resources. Hence, there is an urgent need for new organisational structures and the re-definition of roles at the local level. Local/regional Development Agencies (DAs) have been the result of the initiatives of the authorities at various levels towards the establishment of new institutions which would support the development role of local government and will prepare, implement and evaluate EU projects.

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<sup>23</sup> Critics argue that economic globalisation has shifted power from people and democratic governments. Countries with well-regulated labour markets and social safety become uncompetitive as TNCs move out. Global competition presses people, communities and states "... to outbid one another for corporate favour by offering lower wages, less restrictive environmental and workplace regulations, and larger tax breaks and subsidies than their neighbours" (Korten, 1997).

According to Halkier and Danson (1996) a 'model DA' refers to an organisation complying with three main requirements, namely, at least an arm's-length degree of bureaucratic autonomy, an integrated approach to regional development, and a policy profile in which new types of policy initiatives aimed at stimulating the growth of indigenous enterprise play a significant role. The fulfilment of such requirements will allow it to focus on the long-term competitiveness of the economy of the region, and, accordingly, to take initiatives that stimulate indigenous enterprise in an integrated and proactive manner.

Their role can be roughly summarised as follows:

- co-ordination of development initiatives / projects and their incorporation within an overall strategic development plan
- technical support to local organisations and enterprises in order to promote the strategic plan
- implementation of integrated development projects.

The semi-autonomous organisational set-up at the regional / local level is perceived as having the a number of advantages. Firstly, a regional / local institution is better placed to develop strategies tailored to the specific problems of the individual geographic area. Secondly, a position outside the mainstream bureaucracy usually make it easier for the agencies to attract specialist expertise. Thirdly, a semi-autonomous position limits direct political interference and, hence, allows the adoption of a long-term perspective capable of tackling structural problems.

Different organisational set-ups among DAs produce significant differences with regard to objectives, policy instruments and methods of implementation. A basic distinction can be drawn between DAs positioned either inside or outside the core administrative apparatus of politically elected government. In the case of an arm's-length situation the sponsoring authority only interferes with the activities of the policy-making organisation on a very general level.<sup>24</sup>

As far as policy instruments are concerned, three are basic: supply of advice, finance or infrastructure. The type of advice covers a wide range of areas (general management support especially for small firms, information on market opportunities, international promotion of the region as a location for inward investment, facilitation in the introduction of new technology). In DAs with a 'collective' policy profile, new activities and measures primarily aiming at stimulating the growth and competitiveness of indigenous enterprises are mainly exploited. The rest of the DAs exploit 'traditional' measures associated with the policies of the central government and by the delivery, possibly in a tailored manner, of traditional services.

In Greece, the role of the development agencies is referred to as being technical that is, aiming at supporting local political decisions. In this respect, the character of the agencies is rather managerial than political. The agencies are characterised as S.As with local authorities having the majority of their shares. As a result, D.As are taken, according to the political

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<sup>24</sup> Especially DAs sponsored mainly by local authorities are characterised as far as bureaucratic autonomy is concerned as being in an arm's-length/plural situation, since the sponsors are made up of a group of public institutions at the same level in the hierarchy of territorial government.

circumstances, as either companies of the broader state mechanism or as private companies. This often results in misunderstandings as one could interpret the legal framework according to one's own interests.<sup>25</sup>

### **The development agency of Karditsa**

AN.KA (Development Agency of Karditsa) was established in 1989 by the Union of Local Authorities (TEDK), the Municipalities and the Union of Agricultural Co-operatives of the Prefecture of Karditsa.

According to its foundation declaration AN.KA aims to: support local actors / agencies; promote the co-operation among public, social and private sectors; contribute to the long-term local development strategy and co-ordinate various projects and scattered initiatives; develop local human resources; combine E.U. funding with policies towards viable and efficient investments; promote the local culture; and, contribute to environmental protection. AN.KA's initiatives/activities are informed by the following basic tenets: innovative approaches; collective function and co-operation; environmental awareness; utilisation of new technologies; human resources development.

AN.KA operates under the legal type of S.A. This very legal type gives to a development company the necessary flexibility and effectiveness that the promotion of the local development requires. Profits are used/re-invested in projects in order to cover the agency's own contribution; it has to be mentioned that the shareholders apart from their initial capital do not make any further financial contribution.

Teamwork is the basic operational mode of the agency. The scientists employed development teams according to the task at hand; teams consisted of the appropriate persons, regardless of the hierarchical position of the members regardless. Thus, it is possible for the Director to work under the supervision of hierarchically 'subordinate' scientists. Actually, there is a horizontal operational structure. The permanent co-operation of AN.KA with research institutes, universities and technological institutes, along with its team of executives, assures efficiency, thus providing integrated solutions and consulting services to the public, social and private sector, the transfer of know-how and the adjustment to current developments.

Aspects of strategy. The present main characteristics of AN.KA's operations as shaped in its eight-year history are: mobilisation of the local scientific potential; mobilisation of local (non-human) resources; animation of local development and mobilisation of local populations; mobilisation and reinvestment of local financial resources; and, exploitation of the «outputs» of the projects which are reinvested in services supporting local development

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<sup>25</sup> There are three dominant models for DAs in Greece: i) vertical organisation taking the form of a (development) studies and consultancy office, thus often creating reactions by local technical offices, ii) horizontal, flexible organisation focusing its activity on the support of the local market and on sectors not covered by the local market; this type does not create reactions since it does not compete with existing interests iii) LEADER companies created for the management of the relevant projects without being supported by local dynamics and initiatives; two strands have arisen out of this model a) agencies confined to the management of the LEADER projects, and b) agencies which were organised due to the LEADER projects and further expanded to other activities and projects.

A prime concern of the agency has always been retaining independence from various state/prefectural/local organisations, while co-operation with them is always desirable. The modernisation of the existing local organisations and the planning of new ones capable of supporting local development is constantly promoted since the foundation of the agency. AN.KA's strategy aims at the provision of assistance and consultation to local agencies in order to enable them to carry out their projects. Through such support, AN.KA does not aim to substitute for the local agencies; on the contrary, through training programmes and close co-operation the agency makes an effort to transfer know-how thus to enable them to materialise their projects and initiatives.<sup>26</sup>

AN.KA has also been supporting feasibility studies for SMEs; through the provision of technical support, the agency assured their viability and efficiency within an ever intensifying competitive environment. In addition, the agency, through training schemes, has encouraged local scientists to further develop their skills and become able to tackle problems related to feasibility and development studies for SMEs and agricultural holdings. The agency is open to support any such initiatives since the staff believe that the agency does not aim at substituting for local employment opportunities but rather at supporting their development.<sup>27</sup>

Taking into account that the Greek banking system, as it presently operates, does not seem interested in supporting local efforts unless there are direct and certain profitability rates, the AN.KA began promoting the idea of a local co-operative bank in 1994. As soon as the Commercial Chambers of the Prefecture undertook such an initiative, the agency played a decisive role as far as raising sufficient funds and technical support to back up the establishment of the bank are concerned. AN.KA's belief is that local development in order to be viable in the long run has to be endogenous thus, to rely on all kinds of local resources, without avoiding the seeking of complementary support, like funds, through various other policy instruments.

Another approach to restructuring involves 'building capacities' mainly through training. The agency has had a major contribution in the carrying out of training schemes tailored to local needs. Nevertheless, in 1995 the training section was amalgamated with other training centres all over Greece thus creating a new agency focusing on the provision of training services. The agency still provides advice to the new training organisation as well as to local authorities on local training needs.

The agency, through the community initiatives, trained the eligible target-groups (such as rural women, gypsies, disabled people) as far as employment skills and initiatives are concerned. It further initiated, established and operated in the take off stage three co-operatives and two centres nowadays operating either autonomously or under the auspices of local authorities. In this respect, the strategy of the agency is not to become a huge bureaucratic organisation, but to initiate and further support businesses, organisations, bureaux etc. which afterwards, under an autonomous status, operate mainly based on the

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<sup>26</sup> A major current endeavour concerns the reorganisation of the Union of Agricultural Co-operatives; their existence is endangered due to a multiplicity of factors such as inadequate structure and function, indebtedness, the CAP revision and the cut backs of national supports.

<sup>27</sup> At the moment five such groups are in operation while a new project refers to the integration of basic services in a centre which will facilitate the support groups by providing relevant information on trends, opportunities, legislation etc.

development of their own activities. The agency still supports these organisations free of charge for instance in records keeping, promoting project proposals etc.

Furthermore, the agency, through its 'Carrefour Rural' office and the carrying out of local development projects, has undertaken a major task of providing free of charges information and support to local populations. Due to the bureaucratisation of the extension service, agronomists are mainly restricted to working either indoors related to the provision of all kinds of subsidies or outdoors related to controls (Koutsouris et al., 1995). This results in poor service as far as the provision of updated information, technical support and training to farmers are concerned. AN.KA through evening visits to communities (proactive), the publication of an information bulletin and releases to the local mass media (active) and the reception of all those interested in the offices for further information and support (passive) plays a role of paramount importance for rural populations. Through such activities the agency provides information on EU Regulations, encourages farmers and especially youngsters to join the various schemes and provides technical support for carrying out the relevant procedures. Support is also provided, mainly upon request, in relation to technical matters as far as cultivations and animal breeding are concerned.

One of the major thrusts against socio-economic decline concerns the search for ways of utilisation of local resources and products; the former relates to various forms of soft/alternative tourism, energy resources etc. with the latter relating to production alternatives, processing, labelling and marketing. Through the local development plans the agency has the opportunity not only to examine thoroughly the existing situation in the rural communities (human, economic, ecological, institutional, cultural parameters) but also to stimulate discussions with both the local authorities and the local population. Their participation is deemed of paramount importance if local development procedures are to be sustained in the long run. The decision as to whether they will utilise the proposals of the plans which have been carried out with their participation, is in their hands; the agency helps them to make informed decisions and will further support them if needed.<sup>28</sup> Quite a few initiatives have arisen - not necessarily reflecting the ideas of the agency's staff - in the course of these plans. In this respect, the agency constantly supports 'endogenous' ideas/initiatives promoted by local people / agencies.

Until recently, major efforts were concentrated on the LFAs since they are the areas that most suffer in terms of socio-economic decline, agro-climatic conditions and «conventional» agricultural production opportunities, information provision, EU Regulations applicability and so on. Such efforts certainly continue but new challenges come nowadays from the plain areas due to production quotas and declining subsidies. It has been attempt to be partially overcome the situation in the LFAs through the development of eco-tourism.<sup>29</sup> Eco-tourism is

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<sup>28</sup> Such an example concerns the idea of 'converting' a mountainous village into a pilot biological production unit and further to attract eco-tourists; the idea was put forward by the agency in the summer of 1996 but it was the decision and initiative of the local youth to go on with such a project (biological production, conservation of a local gorge, development of agri-tourism) that finally mattered.

<sup>29</sup> The agency has already carried out two projects in a mountainous area rapidly developing in terms of tourism due to the existence of a lake and its surrounding which are characterised as being of paramount beauty. Through these projects an Eco-touristic Bureau, a Centre of Environmental Research and Information, a pilot farm of organic agriculture, a hydro-biological research station, botanical gardens and a university forest, tracks and a shelter are now in operation. Such projects are complemented through actions within the LEADER II Initiative and the Operational Programme for Agritourism which the agency designed. Furthermore, a special study is carried out concerning the protection of environmentally sensitive areas and/or areas of high natural

considered to be the lever for the enhancement of other activities in the area (primary production, processing of local quality products, traditional crafts and culture, services etc.). As for the plains, searching for financial support in order to set up pilot farms promoting alternative cultivations is currently a major task of the agency. The preservation of the environment from the (over)use of agrochemicals and ground water is also a major task. In general, low input and/or biological agriculture are among the target cultivations all over the prefecture, complemented by energy plantations, seed production etc.

Non-formal networking (i.e. linking-pin structure) is also considered of paramount importance by the agency. For the moment, public services at various levels are in difficulty to co-ordinate projects the establishment of which requires the involvement of more than one service. Individuals are also unwilling to follow the bureaucratic procedures required in order to promote their projects. Therefore, the agency tries to link individuals, private and public services in order to facilitate such procedures as well as to develop a common view of the future.

Problems. None of the aforementioned projects/activities would have been materialised by any other organisation but AN.KA. The prevailing conditions at the prefecture do not encourage the operation of other organisations - private or state. The activity that might have occurred through the private sector would not have been sustainable - due to low profitability or to put it another way the company's activities would last only for the period for which grants were available. Furthermore, no non-profit oriented activities and no encouragement towards local development would have taken place.

Nevertheless, the operation of the agency is not without problems. Such problems can be summarised as follows:

1. the agency has no legitimacy to carry out explicit political choice in terms of development targets and procedures
2. the organisation of grassroots participation and empowerment is difficult to be carried out, due to limited staff and funds and the fact that it does not operate as a research organisation, important issues like approaching «invisible» populations/RPFs, the utilisation of ITK in its full capacity.
3. the continuous change as related to the satisfaction of both local needs and projects carried out requires not only a learning organisation with well qualified and flexible staff but staff with such skills and attitudes allowing for integrated perceptions, interdisciplinary teamwork, empathy with local populations, willingness to take risks and so on; unfortunately such qualified functionaries are neither readily available (in the market) nor are they willing to live and work away from the metropolitan centres;
4. there are limited funds available for setting up alternative/pilot projects mainly as far as agriculture is concerned; the latter in a predominantly agricultural area is of major importance.

## Organisations in Turbulent Environments

Nowadays, organisations have to face the challenge of complex environments, the latter being broadly interpreted. According to Carley and Cristie (1992, p. 181) ‘turbulent environments’ are characterised by “uncertainty about the nature of complex problems and the consequences of collective action, by inconsistent and ill-defined preferences and values, and complex networks of participants with a varying interest in problem resolution.”

In this respect, rigid, hierarchical ‘command and control’ organisations whether public or private are competitively disadvantaged due to slow response, lack of creativity and initiative, and to excessive cost. Today Taylorism is in crisis. Based on the separation of thinking and doing, the very high degree of specialisation and the ‘one best way’ (‘scientific’) of doing things, it created rigidity both in the organisations and the fabric of the society.

Despite resistance, post-Taylorist organisations are driving and shaping both globalisation and local responses. ‘Organic approaches’ view organisations as systems open to their environment as well as sociotechnical systems integrating the needs of individuals and organisations. Such ‘project’ or ‘matrix’ organisations are established on the principle of differentiation and integration. Moreover, according to ‘decision making approaches’ environmental change is to be perceived as a norm; therefore, both new ways of seeing the environment and moving beyond collecting and processing information for the creation of insight and knowledge, are essential. The members of this ‘species’ of organisations have to be able to challenge operating norms and assumptions (i.e. being able to create new ones when appropriate), while the organisation creates space in which many possible actions and behaviours can emerge moderated by an understanding of the limits that need to be placed on behaviour to avoid chaos. Accordingly, team members with multiple skills make it possible for the team as a whole to absorb an increasing range of functions as it develops more effective ways of approaching its work; units are empowered to find innovations around local issues and problems that resonate with their needs (Morgan, 1997).

Therefore, the establishment of alternative, integrated, task-oriented structures such as ‘multi-disciplinary project teams’, and ‘parallel structures to bureaucracies’ is currently on the agenda. Within such flexible structures, adaptive management which is concerned with the process of learning as well as with continuous decision making and adjustments in policy and action, is essential. Among organisational resources, information and human resources (i.e. human intelligence, knowledge based on experience, creativity and flexibility) are the ones which can strengthen the power of organisations.

Evolution and development can be conceived as a process of ‘creative destruction’ where new innovations in effect lead to the destruction of established practices. In addition, every solution leads to a new problem i.e. problem solutions are constantly negated, and the process continuous. Then, ‘permanent innovation’ is seen as the solution vis a vis turbulence. The essential definition of innovation involves the notion of learning to learn or a process of human learning in which knowledge is continually tested and reconstructed. Hence, organisations have to adapt continuously to the rapidly changing environment and integrate the responses to external factors within the learning culture of the organisation. Besides, an understanding that the relations between an organisation and its environment are also socially



constructed is required; strategy making has to be understood as a process of enactment that produces a large element of the future with which the organisation will have to deal.

The aforementioned process of learning includes all members of an organisation and it is permanent, holistic, problem-centred and context relating.<sup>30</sup> It has to be clear that organisational learning is not mechanistic, but it must involve 'cultural change'. Organisations that employ 'culturally programmed strategies' which emphasise continuity, consistency, and stability in order to maintain the status quo are unable to face contemporary challenges. Culture shapes the character of an organisation. The creation of appropriate systems of shared meaning is then the task at hand; new contexts can be created by generating new understandings of a situation, or by engaging in new activities.

Action learning in organisations is the way to achieve direct results in terms of innovation. Action learning strategies differ from traditional approaches in that they strive for changes in organisational culture, the unification of systematic reflection and practice through action-research, and the development of reflective practitioners. Following Carley and Cristie (op. cit.) the action-research approach:

- makes use of the social context of a specific environmental problem or development challenge to increase its own effects;
- redefines the research process towards a rapid, interactive cycle of problem-discovery-reflection-response-problem redefinition;
- replaces the neutral social scientist/observer with a multi-disciplinary team of practitioners and researchers, all working together in a process of mutual education;
- proposes that pluralistic evaluation replace static models of social processes. This is characterised by concern for: institutional functioning, continual monitoring of project implementation, the subjective views of major constituent groups, and methodological 'triangulation' by which a variety of data sources are brought to bear for evaluation; and
- generates replicable learning from the above elements, which is constantly tested against both past experience and the results of current action."<sup>31</sup>

Inter-organisational collaboration is another clear feature of successful management since there is a wide range of phenomena not amenable to control by a single organisation. The logic of complexity suggests that thinking about change in terms of loops rather than lines is more appropriate; that there is a need to replace the idea of mechanical causality with the idea of mutual causality. It follows that solutions depend on the development of shared understandings of the problem, and an ability to reframe system dynamics so that short-term individual interest and long-term sustainability become more balanced and integrated. In this respect, innovative management devotes resources to linkages with other actors, agencies, and sectors. Hence, networks emerge. An informal, task-oriented group, with either its membership being free to grow or by contracting the skills necessary to address a specific

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<sup>30</sup> This way "the whole organisation is set on an upward spiral where innovation in work methods or practices, provides learning opportunities leading to the development of new competencies and insights which in turn influences and changes the way work is carried out" (Stahl et al., 1993, p. 57)

<sup>31</sup> For participation and action research see: Nelson N. and S. Wright, Power and Participatory Development, Intermediate Technologies Publ., 1995; Oakley P. et al., Projects with People, ILO, 1991; Fals-Borda O., and M. A. Rahman, Action and Knowledge, Intermediate Technology Publ., 1991; Oakley P. and D. Marsden, Approaches to Participation in Rural Development, ILO, 1984.

problem is a vehicle for moving, through learning-by-doing, from specific tasks to broader tasks of sustainable development.

The action-oriented network is characterised as a linking-pin structure. It is a centre of communication, general services, co-ordination and 'drive' towards the achievement of its tasks. Even without formal status it will play a key role in integrating the loosely coupled system. In defining and implementing activities towards sustainable development, conflict between organisations may well arise. In all action-oriented networks therefore, bargaining to resolve conflicts is likely to be a central mode of political action. Bargaining in turn can be made more effective by processes of organisational learning and facilitation / mediation (Engel, 1995). Consensus building involves a dynamic process that requires skill and perseverance. It is concerned with how things are done (process, thoughts and feelings) as well as what is done and changing perceptions is a key to the process.

## Conclusion

New policy approaches to (rural) development put increased emphasis on the regional and local levels for planning and intervention. New models such as 'bottom-up development' arise and the need for participative approaches is stressed. The concept of sustainability implies the maintenance or enhancement of environmental, economic and social capital over time. Thus far, conventional approaches to extension have been dominated by various forms of the TOT model and the «progressive farmer» strategy. Moving to more sustainable practices calls for the abandonment of the normative stereotypes in the way farmers are 'seen' and their needs are 'understood', the appreciation of local knowledge, the facilitation of learning processes in groups over time, PTD and so on (Röling, 1994). In turn, these require various alternative forms of education and training following either FSR/E approaches or their alternatives (Jiggins, 1994), thus introducing an interdisciplinary focus, a systems perspective and a more equal participation of researcher and farmer in the design of new technology in the research set-up.

DAs, especially in view of the bureaucratisation or privatisation of the extension services, can be the alternative means to provide information - training - technical support with emphasis on 'excluded groups' suffering from poverty and/or various other forms of deprivation. More generally, they are in a strong position to animate local development. DAs working at regional / local level have better knowledge of opportunities and constraints and a more integrated and flexible approach than the state bureaucratic machinery. In addition, they often seek more popular participation, mobilise local and regional systems of governance, and support private and public 'entrepreneurship' and innovation.

In this context, linkage strategies / networking are of great importance for DAs. They are conscious attempts to create partnerships between levels and interests in order to achieve optimum (sub)system performance. DAs are in a position to recognise that some problems are related to the generation, sharing and use of knowledge and information and take the initiative to animate such a procedure. DAs also carry out applied research for planning purposes such as the identification of constraints, possibilities and potentials at local level. Despite the fact that such research does not directly serve theory or method it is, through action research, quite relevant at least for policy and development practice due to its multi-

sectoral and integrated approach. Further, it contributes to the enrichment of knowledge about the prevailing situation.

In this respect DAs are quite close to the mode of operation of FSR/E teams. They have accumulated vast experience, they understand farmers, they know how to elicit participation, they have developed tools and methods, and they have built formal and informal networks of agricultural and social networks through which information and experience flow more or less effectively to other areas. In addition they may, more or less, take a systems approach, try to develop an understanding of the set of conditions that determine livelihoods through diagnostic studies and enhanced participation. But, it must be kept in mind that the contribution of DAs to development is not self-evident. It ultimately depends on their autonomy, strategy and objectives, human and non-human resources.

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