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Hirschmann, D.

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UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

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by: D Hirschmann

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ADMINISTRATION OF PLANNING IN LESOTHO

A Case-Study : the Ramabanta's - Semonkong Road[x]

INTRODUCTORY EXPLANATION

Since it is understood that this will be the first of a few papers to be presented to this programme of seminars, it is intended that it serve the purpose of a somewhat simple introduction to the research I am carrying out in Lesotho. The focus of that research is concerned with the processes, machinery and administration of development planning in Lesotho. 'Development planning' is interpreted, not as the five-yearly preparation of a national plan, nor in orthodox terms involving a systematic process of research - preparation - formulation - review of programmes and plans, but in a somewhat broader and less formalistic sense, to cover those tasks which the Central Planning Office, the ministerial planning units, various planning committees etc. do in fact undertake; and this includes a rather more fragmentary list of functions such as the preparation of the annual capital budget, preparation of projects for donor assistance personnel, processing of scholarships, negotiations with visiting aid missions, etc.

If one accepts Bernard Schaffer's view that "development administration is about development programmes, policies and projects in those conditions in which there are peculiarly low capacities and severe obstacles to meeting them"(1) and in consequence, using A.L. Adu's words, "the present generation of politicians and administrators is bound to operate under conditions of uncertainty, of experimentation and of insecurity"(2) secondly, that administrative development has been

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(1) Bernard Schaffer, The Administrative Factor, Papers in Organisation, Politics and Development, London, Frank Cass, 1973, p.245.

(2) A.L. Adu, The Administrator and Change, in Anthony H. Rweyemamu and Goran Hyden (eds.), A. Decade of Public Administration in Africa, Nairobi, East African Literature Bureau, 1975, p.23.

something of a 'missing ingredient' in the development planning of many countries[3]; and thirdly, that in a very small, poor and dependent country, classified by the U.N. as one of the least developed of the developing countries, problems are likely to be intensified; and, in addition, when one discovers that senior government officers are fully aware of, and willing to discuss, weaknesses in the administrative system; one realises that the somewhat naive-agressive personal need to justify one's research by building up an impressive body of evidence to prove that the system is malfunctioning, becomes redundant. In these circumstances, one tries, through one's research, rather to clarify and analyse, and occasionally to communicate and advise.

In this paper, I have presented an uncomplicated case study, but one which I hope will give some insight into the tasks undertaken by the planning machinery, and will illustrate the kinds of problems and situations which arise. The information has been gathered principally from correspondence and documents in the files of the Central Planning Office (CPO) and Community Development Office - which includes the functions of the former Food Aid Programme Office (FAPO), and from interviews.*

THE CASE STUDY

Semonkong is a mountain village about 110 kilometres from Maseru. In the area there are trading and mission stations, schools receiving World Food Programme food through transport provided by the Save the Children Fund, a government clinic, a police post and a small tourist lodge. Nearby is the spectacular (630 foot) Malotsunyane (Lebihan) Falls, which together with fishing and general scenery makes it an area of considerable tourist potential. The area also has potential for wool and mohair production, and wheat, peas and beans grow well. A second impressive waterfall in the vicinity has been identified as a possible site for a hydro-electric scheme, and the Lesotho Bank has for some time been interested in building a hotel and developing it as a tourist centre.

In the late 1950's a tractor was transported, partly by sled, over the mountains to Semonkong, and this remained the only motorised vehicle to reach the area until 1971. Until that year, the only links with the outside world were bridle paths and an air link with Maseru, started in 1952. In 1971 an extremely rough

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(3) Donald C. and Alice B. Stone, Creation of Administrative Capability: The Missing Ingredient in Development Strategy, Paper at Conference on Strategy for Development, Jan Smuts House, 1974.

* References have not been attached to this paper, but should there by any queries, I shall make them available at the seminar.

45 kilometre track was completed by local villagers, joining Semonkong to Ramabanta's, a small village from which there are two poor standard roads to Maseru.

The need for a road had been recognised by the Government, and as early as 1967 a project memorandum was put forward for British financing. This memorandum proposed a road coming from the south - from Mohales Hoek to Mafeteng through the Ribaneng Valley to Semonkong - hereafter called the southern route. The British agreed to grants of R25,000 for surveying the road and R250,000 for building operations during the financial year 1968/9. Work commenced and reached a point south of the Ribaneng Valley, before being called to a halt at a point of no significance.(1) Continuation was scheduled for the first three years of the First Five Year Plan (1970-75) at an estimated further cost of R165,000(2), and accordingly - if a little belatedly - in early 1971 Lesotho requested the British Government to provide the money for the completion of the road to Semonkong.(3) By this stage, the British had grown dubious about the utility of the road, and they began sending queries to CPO, such as a request for a traffic count.(4) The CPO replied to this that it would be a senseless exercise to conduct on a road that not only went nowhere but of which part was inaccessible since no bridge had been constructed over a major river.(5) During the course of the year the British did give approval in principle, but then soon after decided to shelve continuation of the road. Two reasons were given for this: firstly, there were financial constraints, and secondly, the British wanted to await the results of a national transportation study being carried out by Stellenbosch University.(6) This delay proved unproductive since the research team ran out of money and the Study never materialised.(7)

The people of the Semonkong area, however, were not interested in the southern route. Although they had been informed about the intended road from the south, their most important links were with Maseru, and in their view it would be advantageous to build a road which linked them with the capital and not with the south. With the advice of a foreman from the Food Aid Office, who acted without his headquarter's knowledge, the villagers set about constructing their own rough track (along what I shall call the villagers' route) which they completed by the middle of 1971, and which enabled a vehicle to reach Semonkong for the first time.(8)

In view of the community's enthusiasm for the road, FAPO instructed its surveyor to report on the track and what would be required to improve it. His report stated that it was of a very poor standard and extremely dangerous and should be

used only by vehicles attached to a construction unit. To bring this road up to a standard suitable for four-wheel drive vehicles, he proposed the hiring for three months of compressors and bulldozers and other accessories, at a total cost of R10,000 (this was later re-costed at R13,000).(9)

In November 1971, FAPO wrote to the Cabinet Office, enclosing the surveyor's report and mentioning that at a later date the track could be brought up to the standard of a Food Aid access track, at the cost of a further R17,000 (which would include a low-level river crossing). FAPO asked the Cabinet Office for a policy decision on the continuation of the southern road before it could approach the British - who would be unwilling to assist with the villagers' road when they had already been requested to help with the other - or the Americans. FAPO also recommended that the southern route be "shelved completely", as it had no popular support and no great economic advantage over the villagers' road. FAPO would also not be in a position to approach food donors for assistance with food-for-work labour, until it had assurances from the government that it would obtain financial assistance for the machinery.(10) (A copy was sent to the CPO).

By this stage the villagers had further shown their interest by forming a committee which collected R252 from among themselves, to which the Archbishop donated R100, St. Leonard's Mission R150 and the Anglican Mission R50. In December the Prime Minister expressed support for this road, particularly as he wished to hold a pitso in Semonkong, and he contributed R500 to be spent on 20 workers at 30 cents each per day, and 2 foremen at 50 cents each per day, to work on the road until the money was used up.(11)

Cabinet Office agreed to the FAPO suggestion to call a meeting of interested parties(12) (copy to CPO) and did so on 12 January 1972. The meeting decided not to alter the plans to construct the southern road, since it had already been approved for funding by the UK, had been programmed for 1972, and the people along the planned route were anticipating it and should not be disappointed. But in addition it was decided that the R10,000 required for machinery in support of food aid labour on the villagers' road should be sought from a donor other than the U.K. It was estimated that the useful life of the track would be about 4 years, and thereafter, it was thought, traffic to and from Semonkong would find it easier and more economical to use the southern road. (Copies of the record of the meeting were sent to CPO).(13)

Meanwhile on 10 January 1972, a Catholic Father stationed near Semonkong, on behalf of the committee, sent an application for a United States self-help project to the Ministry of Works (with copies to the CPO and the US Embassy). That Ministry is in fact responsible for larger-scale road projects than those generally dealt with under self-help applications. On 2 February 1972, CPO wrote to Works to ask whether it approved the project.(14) It appear that there was no reply, and CPO took no further action.

On 24 April 1972, FAPO, referring to all the correspondence copied to CPO, and to the meeting under the Senior Permanent Secretary in Cabinet Office (mentioned above), requested CPO to advise it on a suitable donor and it enclosed a memorandum setting out some background to the project.(15) As FAPO falls under the Cabinet complex of departments, the Cabinet Planning Unit wrote to FAPO and pointed out that all requests to CPO should be routed through the Planning Unit.(16) The request was then sent to the Planning Unit, (with a copy to CPO) and the Planning Unit conveyed this to CPO, urging an early reply.(17)

A full year passed, by which stage Catholic Relief Services had agreed and scheduled in its annual programme to provide food for 200 workers and a foreman, conditional on the government obtaining the finance for the necessary machinery. As CPO had still not responded, FAPO wrote to the US Embassy, enclosing a memorandum giving background information and expressing the local enthusiasm for the project. FAPO said that if the Embassy would state that it might be possible to find funds, it would submit a formal application to CPO.(18) The US Embassy replied that it had received a copy of the Catholic Father's application to the Ministry of Works, but had not yet received an application from CPO. It suggested FAPO check the status of the project with CPO or Works. "If Government approves the project we will immediately put it in the queue of approved projects for which we will attempt to find funding." (Copy to CPO).(19)

FAPO now wrote to CPO, pointing out that it was 16 months since they had requested advice, and that the state of the track was deteriorating and becoming more dangerous, and asking whether CPO would support the project.(20) In October 1973 the matter was raised in Parliament, and the Minister explained why the southern road had come to a halt.(21) That same month the District Administrator of Maseru called a series of meetings at the main villages along the villagers' route and raised a further R300 from them. He wrote to all government departments including FAPO and CPO and requested most urgently assistance with the road and with the causeway over the largest river which could not be crossed during the rainy season.(22)

Thus at various stages this project had received the support of the Prime Minister, the Senior Permanent Secretary, FAPO, the District Administrator of Maseru, the local Missions, the Archbishop, Catholic Relief Services, the US Embassy and the local people who had contributed both labour and money. Yet there was still no response from the CPO.

On 1 March 1974, FAPO, reminding CPO of the requests of April 1972 and August 1973, and explaining that it was understood that a German aid mission that was visiting Lesotho might be interested in financing the road, asked CPO to raise the matter with them.(23) There is no evidence that CPO has ever replied to that.

There are some cogent reasons why the Central Planning Office may have been unwilling to support the villagers' road project. Firstly, there was the southern road which was half completed, and had received British approval in principle; it may have felt that the chances of the southern road being completed would be compromised were the British to discover that it had no popular support. or were they to realise that the government had plans to support a second road project to the same place. In this respect the Cabinet Office decision was unhelpful, because even if CPO went to another donor for support of the other road, the word would almost certainly reach the ears of the High Commission. Even if Cabinet Office had accepted the FAPO suggestion to "shelve completely" the southern road, the CPO would have been put in the somewhat embarrassing position of informing a donor that the money which had gone into building a road into the middle of nowhere had resulted from the mistaken judgement of the government. Secondly, there was a period of delay in which the CPO and the British were waiting for the results of the Stellenbosch Transportation Study which was intended to determine a national order of priorities for road building. As has been mentioned, this eventually failed to materialise. No sooner had this failed than another donor was found who was willing to fund a transportation study to be undertaken by a firm of consultants. So once again the CPO was in a position of not wanting to make decisions on any road building until the consultants' report was received.

That the potential of Semonkong as an area for development was in the minds of CPO staff - at least from time to time - is clear: the southern road was included in the First Plan, prepared by the CPO; and when the consultants' draft report arrived, the CPO in pointing out certain weaknesses, said that it failed to relate roads to project areas and gave as one example the road to Semonkong about which the report

had failed to mention tourism and electricity.[24] Further, when the African Development Bank informed the Lesotho Government that it was interested in funding a road project in Lesotho, the CPO indentified the Ramabanta's-Semonkong Road, i.e. the villagers' road, "as the most obvious road qualifying for their assistance". "It will have a large impact on the lives of the villagers (rural development); it leads to the site of the proposed hydro-electric scheme aimed at decreasing Lesotho's dependence on the RSA."[25] (Rural development and decreasing dependence on South Africa are two of the criteria used by the ADB in deciding on projects for financing.) This was taken up with the ADB and consultants requested.[26] Probably because this request had been put up to the ADB, which the CPO considered the most appropriate donor, it would not have accepted FAPO's suggestion to raise it with the Germans, whom CPO felt should be requested to assist in other fields.

The final consultants' report, which took into account the remarks of the CPO, notes in connection with the proposed road to Semonkong, the tourist potential, the hydro-electrical potential, the substantial population and the wool and mohair possibilities, and mentions the very poor condition of the road, the difficult climbs, hairpin bends and sharp ascents and descents. It proposed three alternative standards for the road costing R3,2 million, R1,8 million and R676,000 from Roma to Ramabanta's to Semonkong.[27] The CPO chose to negotiate on the most expensive of the three and included it in its draft Second Five Year Plan proposals, placed before a conference of donors held in April 1975.[28] The ADB agreed to undertake a detailed feasibility study of this road and one from Leribe to Butha Buthe to Oxbow at a combined cost of $1 million, for which a loan agreement would be signed. The ADB delegate to the conference also indicated that his Bank would consider assisting with the building of the road, once the studies had been completed.[29] Thus barring serious hitches, it is possible that a study will be undertaken in the next year or two and that a good gravel road might be built two years after that, thus bringing the road to Semonkong in 1979 or 1980.

The case study illustrates numerous points, many of which are obvious, but some of which may be worth mentioning.

(a) In discussing the case study, an officer in FAPO said:

> I feel that the CPO don't appreciate the pressures of local leaders - they are insulated from local pressures and operate at a higher level of planning. They should operate at a higher level, but they should have contact and understanding of the pressures as exerted by local leaders.(30)

This does afford an example of the difference in the nature of pressures which 'contact' bodies, more particularly contact agents such as community development officers and extension agents, face, from those which the CPO confronts.

(b) It provides a particularly serious example of a project for which local support had been demonstrated, and of which the CPO failed to take advantage. The wider support which the villagers' road received has been mentioned - yet the CPO remained unmoved.

(c) It demonstrates the problem of differing times scales. The local community, their enthusiasm having been excited, wanted to build the road immediately. Though the standard of the road would be poor, it would have been completed in three months. The CPO, on the other hand, firstly (in fulfilment of the requirements of rational decision-making) wanted to obtain the results of a comprehensive transportation survey so as to be able to determine the national priority rating of the road; secondly, needed to identify a specific donor who would be interested in that particular type of project; thirdly, selected a high standard road (which is necessary if one wants to raise substantially the number of tourists, and will reduce vehicle and road maintenance costs) which in turn requires a full engineering study. The self-help project would have been constructed - including a delay in US approval - by the middle of 1972. The good road, as has been noted, might be completed by 1979. This means a delay of 7 years. Although this case is an extreme example, the problem of community enthusiasm either waning before confirmation and support arrive or simply being disappointed because there are insufficient resources for the project, arises regularly. The issue is quite often complicated further by the community commencing work on a project, without the approval of FAPO or CPO, but in order to force their hand.

(d) The case study illustrates the type of difficulty which arises in consequence of government having established no policy on or machinery for supervising rural development. Thus at various stages the church, the village committee, FAPO, the District Administrator, the Ministry of Works became involved in the attempts to get the villagers' road moving. As one person put it:

> There is a general lack of clarity as to who is responsible for what in the provision of support services for development in rural areas... This leads to lack of coordination of effort, overlapping of activity and very weak planning and programming at the district level.(31)

(e) It highlights a few points about costs of projects. Excluding food aid which had been approved by a donor, the self-help project would have required R13,000 from the US Embassy Self Help Fund, and a further R17,000 to bring it up to the standard of a FAPO access track, i.e. a total of R30,000, obtainable as a grant. In comparison, the total cost of the high standard gravel road (including say two-fifths of the expense of the engineering study) will amount to approximately R3.5 million, and this will be on loan. While it is easy to be wise after the event, one can see now that the self-help project which would have cost less than 1% of the proposed road, should not therefore have compromised its acceptibility to a donor, would have provided the village with improved access to Maseru and would have facilitated government, mission, and trader contact with Semonkong and the villages along the way for the intervening 7 or 8 years. Finally the fact that CPO selected the most expensive of the three alternatives indicates that finding foreign assistance is not a serious constraint, and that in many cases donors prefer to finance large-scale rather than smaller projects.

(f) It provides a grave example of CPO's non-responsiveness to letters. Assuming that CPO had reasons for not supporting the self-help project, it at no time communicated them to the people concerned. It received at least 4 direct requests and at least 7 copies of correspondence, and it reacted only once (its letter to the Ministry of Works, which it failed to follow up). Thus at no time during this period of about 4 years have FAPO or the villagers been given any idea whatever of CPO intentions regarding their request for assistance.

(g) Nobody phoned CPO to ask why.

DAVID HIRSCHMANN