

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

Memorandum

TO : Mr. Sanford J. Stone, HAVR

DATE: September 11, 1976

FROM : Richard B. Scott, DP

SUBJECT: The Establishment of a Socio-Economic Research and Project
Monitoring Unit within HAVA

This memo outlines some basic ideas that would be instrumental in the establishment of a socio-economic research and project monitoring unit within HAVA. There are few new ideas presented beyond those already outlined in the memos of 9 June 76, "Some Key Issues of Planning for Phase II of the Helmand Drainage Project; Information, Socio-Economic Research and Organization of the Hand-Labor Force "; and 14 June 76, "A List of Research - Monitoring Activities to be Accomplished by the Proposed Research Unit Within HAVA: The Helmand Drainage Project".

Some of the previously presented ideas have been expanded and the presentation has been reorganized. This memo does not assume to be the final or complete answer to organizing such a unit but it can be used as a starting discussion paper for use with HAVA. A discussion of this sort seems to be a reasonable starting point, and I am available for any further discussions as they may develop.

1. Need: Presently, under Phase I of the Helmand Drainage Project, virtually all socio-economic research and monitoring activities are instituted by USAID and supported in the field by HAVA personnel drawn from a variety of sections, e.g., Engineering, Planning, Extension, Agricultural Research, Statistics. These activities should be located bureaucratically within an operational unit of HAVA, with the specific responsibility and required support to do the necessary socio-economic research and project monitoring of the Drainage Project with USAID help and some supervision. Baseline data should be gathered on all proposed project areas before they are actually decided upon as areas where the on-farm drain work is to be accomplished. Socio-economic status should be one of the main elements involved in the choice of project beneficiaries. And a continuous monitoring process of the farmers attitudes toward the project should be implemented to insure a continuing cooperative project atmosphere.



It should be stressed here that the proposed unit would carry out a research-monitoring activity and not be directly involved with any particular aspect of project implementation. For a negative example, the unit would not be directly involved in the farmer information and training activity but would be responsible for furnishing information to the IAVA action unit about shifting farmer attitudes and levels of project knowledge. Experience of the past with similar research units in other countries suggests that direct involvement with project implementation tends to bias research results if not create some barriers of communication with the farmers. This separation of function is commonly not clearly understood by government civil servant-researchers who tend to fall into the role of promisors-implementors vis-a-vis the farmers while at the same time attempting to gather reliable information but the two functions do not easily mix. The members of the research unit should clearly understand their function of information - gathering only, which means training, discipline and close field monitoring of their work, at least in the early stages. To emphasize this point, it is not uncommon for government civil servants who become researchers to be more anxious to inform farmers about proposed government action (civil servant original function) than to be the good listeners of the research role.

2. Research Unit Location: To insure neutrality of research results the research unit should be independent of the Technical Division. The most logical location for the unit would be the Planning and Statistics (P and S) section, a HAVA staff organization which already has many of the functions and skills necessary to carry out a research activity. But the activity should not simply be turned over to the P and S section. A recognized separate research unit should be established within this section with staff, an office, and specific project-oriented responsibilities.

3. Staff and Transportation: The research unit should be made up of a relatively small permanent staff of perhaps 3 to 4 persons with experience and training in field research activities. Typing and printing services should be available outside the unit itself which would focus of field activities and analysis. The head of the unit should have authority to act and the position should not be a joint position with that of head of the P and S section. Such an appointment fragments the necessary focus on the research activities.

In situations where a large number of farmers require interviewing in a relatively short time, the unit must have the standing authority to tap trained interviewers who work in other sections of HAVA. These are individuals (and the system of recruitment) who gained interviewing training and experience during the 1976 Farm Economic Survey (FES).

The permanent staff should be chosen on the basis of training, experience and the ability to communicate easily and openly with the farmers, a quality which is basic to good interviewing and not always easily trained into the individual. Not everyone has the qualities to make an effective interviewer, e.g., being first a good listener. This staff should be young, intelligent, energetic and willing to work long hours in the field.

It should not be assumed that HAVA presently has all the skills necessary to pursue this activity but it comes fairly close. Certainly a continuous training process is necessary in the field. The problems associated with the establishment of such a unit would be primarily organizational, and having clearly stated, simple expectations of a job description.

The research unit would not have need of a permanently assigned vehicle at present but must have easy access to such transportation when required. During the periods of field work, the need for transport would be on a continuous basis and over long hours and weekends. Timing of research and analysis is what makes or breaks the utility of a research unit, and this involves the key elements of adequate personnel, supplies, time and transport.

4. The Work: In the process of selection of areas for on-farm drain work, a clearer statement of beneficiaries is needed. While there is a strong political element involved in the selection of areas in which to work, which must be accepted, it would be useful for HAVA and for USAID to have a clear statement of the socio-economic status of the farmers to-be-affected before the final decision to work is made.

(a) The Research Unit would have the responsibility to survey potential farmer beneficiaries using probably a revised and shortened 1976 Farm Economic Survey (FES) interview schedule. This could result in a relatively simple socio-economic profile of the area farmers in terms of land holdings, land farmed, cropping patterns, family size, sharecropping patterns, crop production, etc. This profile would aid in identifying the most needy groups and areas. It would also serve as baseline data for future evaluation of results.

In the present phase of the project, this sort of information has been gathered on 2 of the 4 on-farm drain project areas, partly during the FES field work period and partly after. But it was collected after the decision to work was made. The amount of data collected can and should be reduced to make timely analysis possible.

(b) Additional brief studies should be made of farmer awareness of drainage problems and level of knowledge of cause. This information would be useful to the proposed information and training elements in the project, if implemented. At present, it is not clear that the farmers realize the relationship between over-irrigation and salting/drainage problems, thus making water management activities difficult, even if HAVA would agree.

(c) Continual research and monitoring of the hand-labor force constructing drains should be accomplished to maintain a clear understanding for each work area of who is working and work force stability. Worker characteristics and responses to questions are indicators. Over time, changes in work force composition can be identified. At present, we know very little about the available labor pool by season, its characteristics and the expected wage levels, making planning a chancy proposition. Given some time and field study, this situation could be changed.

(d) Monitoring and researching farmer information and training activities, perhaps to be accomplished by a different HAVA/SCS unit, would be a useful control measure, via formal and informal interviewing. At what point do the farmers to be affected by the project understand what is to be done to their land and how is this to influence crop production? What are farmer responsibilities for maintenance? If a farmer can clearly explain what is to be done to his land to someone other than the one who has informed him, he probably understands. This would be a feed-back activity for the training element.

(e) Through time and informal contacts among the farmers, established at the time of the initial survey work, farmer attitudes toward the project and its goals and personnel should be monitored for changes. Attitudes do shift over time for various reasons, sometimes for the worse through ignorance, rumor or misinformation. Awareness of such shifts is the first step to remedial action, and this is not a time-consuming activity.

(f) A follow-up to the FES studies ((a) above) in the areas developed with on-farm drains one or two years after the fact would give useful comparative and evaluation data for project activities. What were the benefits gained from the project? What were the losses? Without such follow-up, it is difficult to measure the results of our development efforts.

This is probably more work than the small unit proposed can accomplish on a full time basis, and it will take time for members of the unit to realize that they are not only a field research arm for the project but also a constant source of feedback for the other action elements. A most important factor to train into the unit personnel, however, as noted, is that it is an information-gathering, not action, unit, and the gathering and analysis of accurate information is a first step to adequate planning.

The possible argument may be raised that the project does not have time to gather this kind of information, a rationalization for remaining ignorant. The data gathering would not interfere with or delay any other project activity, assuming favorable results. These data can be gathered and analyzed more quickly (and at the same time) than the necessary soils data for a given area. Those gathering and analyzing the data would be outside the Technical Division, which may cause some disagreement, but thus not put further strain on that Division's limited personnel resources.

Finally, as noted, this memo is an outline of some of the details I think important in setting up a Project Research and Monitoring Unit within HAVA. It should be used as a discussion paper, not as the final statement of organization. I am available for any further discussions as they may develop.

cc:

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