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ASSESSING LOCAL ADMINISTRATIVE  
CAPACITY FOR DEVELOPMENT  
PURPOSES: A KENYAN CASE

By

W. Ouma Oyugi  
Lecturer, Department of  
Government  
University of Nairobi

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ABSTRACT

This paper is based on field data, collected between 1970-1972. It assesses the administrative potential and capacity that existed in one sub-district at the time an integrated rural development programme was being launched in the area. The findings show that the administrative system which existed at the time was too weak to support the programme. The factors which accounted for the weaknesses are discussed in some details.

ASSESSING LOCAL ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITY FOR  
DEVELOPMENT PURPOSES: A KENYAN CASE\*

I

The failure to implement development programmes at the local level once they are formulated can be attributed to a number of factors. Among them is the administrative incapacity of the implementing agencies, departments or people as the case may be. In this paper we shall be concerned with the analysis of some of the administrative factors that retard the development process at the local level.

The data on which the paper is based was collected between March 1970-June 72 and covered the period between 1967-1971. The study was conducted in Migori-Division of South Nyanza District where a special integrated rural development programme had just been initiated. The following departments were covered in the survey.

(1) Agriculture (2) Provincial Administration (3) Community Development (4) Cooperatives. These departments were chosen for the very simple reason that they are usually the ones with organizational (or personnel) representation at the local level and also because of the important roles they play in planned development. Data was collected through oral interviews, questionnaire and observations. The findings are discussed below.

II

The paper begins with an examination at the nature of departmental capacity in the area at the time the special integrated rural development programme was being introduced. This is important because an increase in work load without a corresponding increase in personnel usually leads to administrative incapacitation-

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\* The data used here is from the "reserve bank" developed when I was in the field collecting data for my Ph.D. thesis. This is therefore the first time they have been analysed and used. I am indebted to the Dean's Committee and to the I.D.S. (University of Nairobi) for the grants which enabled me to do the study. Of course they are not responsible for what I have said here.



Of the 22 (out of the 45) extension agents who returned the questionnaire all except 4 had over five years on the job experience, and 68% had between 11-30 years in service. If the length of service is an indicator of the level of experience then most of the staff in the area were experienced.

However, experience alone may not tell the whole story. When people are half educated rarely do they make use of their experience in an innovative manner. They usually are routine oriented. Faced with new situations which require creativity they become functionally immobile. This characteristic was noticed among the junior extension staff in the department of agriculture. Looking at their standards of formal education we notice in the table below that it was very low.

Formal Educational Standards

Location	Primary		Secondary		TOTAL
	Lower (Std 1-IV)	Upper (Std V-VIII)	Lower Form I-II	Upper Form III-IV	
SUIA	2	3			5
KABEL	2	3		1	6
KANYAKAGO	7	4			11
					22

Thus, the respondents were (except one) all primary school leavers with 50% having less than five years of formal education. These could neither read nor understand official communication in English (the official working language). They depended on the relatively "more educated" colleagues in preparing their official communications up the hierarchy (eg. monthly reports). Since most of the literature existing on all government programmes including the new (special rural development) programme that they were to work on, were written in English, inevitably they had difficulties in directly extracting the information on their own. They depended mainly on the divisional superiors who came and summed it up for them "in a way they understood them themselves".

Lack of proper formal education coupled with the age factor does even complicate the matter further; for it means that the staff in question cannot benefit from on-the-job training. As the table below shows, most of the agents were too old to benefit from any form of on-the-job education (or training)

Ages of Extension Agents (Agriculture)

Location	15-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	Over 50	TOTAL
SUIA	-	2	-	1	2	5
KADEN	-	1	3	1	1	6
KAIYALIKAGO	-	3	2	6	-	11
						22

Looking at the age groups only 6 of the 22 respondents could benefit from some form of on the job education or training; and over 50% were too old and were in fact simply awaiting the fateful day when they would be asked to retire!

But even for the few that were trainable there was very little functional benefits they were likely to achieve from the short duration courses that they usually attended. Most of the courses lasted for only a few days - and only rarely for over three weeks.

The total picture which emerges in the department of agriculture is that the situation which the new programme inherited was too weak to sustain it. We shall now examine the situation in the other departments.

The Provincial Administration which has always been used (whether during colonialism or after) as the instrument for penetration and control at the local level is usually well represented in every administrative unit - from the sub-location to the Provincial level. At the time of the survey, there were two District Officers (in charge of the two divisions in the programme area)

and a chief and a sub-chief in each of the seven locations and twenty-two sub-locations respectively.

Of the seven chiefs three were formally interviewed. Informal discussions were held with all the seven. The biodata gathered is presented below.

Information on Chiefs and Sub-Chiefs

<u>Chief*</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Length in Service</u>	<u>Level of Educ.</u>	<u>Exist. of Dev. Comm</u>	<u>Level of Awareness</u>
(i)	35	5	Viii P2	Weak	low
(ii)	50	14	Nil	Weak	low
(iii)	40	7	VI	Weak	low
<hr/>					
<u>Sub-Chief</u>					
(i)	50	4	Lower-Primary	Weak	low
ii	55	13	None	Weak	low
iii	37	4	Lower-Primary	weak	low
iv	44	8	Lower-Primary	None	Low
v	33	3	VIII	None	Fair
vi	50	8	Lower-Primary	Weak	Fair
vii	26	3	VIII	Weak	Fair
viii	40	3	Lower-Primary	Weak	low

\* The names of the Chiefs and Sub-Chiefs have been left out. The Roman numbers represent the real people interviewed.

From the table it is apparent that all the chiefs and the sub-chiefs except one, were mature people—a factor which for a long time has been significant in the appointment of these people. Six of the seven chiefs had been appointed after independence, and seven of the eight sub-chiefs had been appointed a year before or after independence. Educationally they were all of Primary education standard with the majority of them in the lower primary category (standards I-IV) or less. Only three of the eleven chiefs and sub-chiefs interviewed formally, could read and write English satisfactorily. The rest could hardly do so.

Thus, we notice that in the provincial Administration as in the department of Agriculture the level of education of the locational and sub-locational staff was very low indeed. They could not be expected therefore to understand on their own,



most of the literature then existing on Development Programmes - for which they were being called upon to mobilize the people. That may also explain why the majority (8 out of 11) had very low awareness (see table above last column) of what the special programme was all about.

When asked what their major duties are, almost all of them mentioned "mobilizing the people for development" and on a further question "How do you do this" the answer was invariably "through the barazas and in the self-help committees". Yet three sub-chiefs confessed such committees had not been established in their areas and the remaining five plus the three chiefs though asserting the existence of the committees all agreed they were too weak to be of any use. One chief could not even remember whether the locational community development committee in his location had met in the last year or so.

The foregoing was the state of affairs existing at the time the special Rural Development Programme was launched in the area - and there were no immediate changes introduced at the locational level and below to accommodate the new programme. With most of the sub-chiefs and chiefs either illiterate or semi-literate, the level of awareness remained as low as it had been before the programme was introduced. For those who could read and write English, the understanding was not satisfactory either. They depended on the Divisional Officers for most of the information on the programme. With frequent transfers which we will discuss in the next section of this paper, the going was not smooth and continuous at all, even though numerically the situation looked normal.

The department whose functions overlap with those of the Provincial Administration is Community Development. Like the Provincial Administration, its major duty is mobilization of the people for development. But mobilization means very little unless the mobilizers know "for what" they are mobilizing.

That awareness on the part of the local staff of the department was not there as the interviews revealed. They had heard of the programme but not of its details. They were not in a position both by level of education and of position

to know that certain documents existed in which the objectives and principle of the programmes were explained. Above all none of them could be expected to understand the detailed arguments in the then existing documents<sup>1</sup> though their level of education was relatively higher than those of their counterparts in the other departments.

Community Development Assistants

Names	Age	Length in Service	Level of Education	Training	Existence of Dev. Com	Level of Awareness
i	40	6	Upper Primary	7 months	yes	Fair
ii	30	6	Upper Primary	14 months	yes	Fair
iii	35		" "	yes	yes	low
iv	30		" "	yes	yes	low
v	28		" "	yes	yes	low
vi	30		" "	yes	yes	low
vii	25		" "	yes	yes	vague
viii	40		" "	yes	yes	Fair

The table shows that except for two men, most of the C.As were relatively younger compared to their counterparts in the other departments. Yet quite a number of them in spite of their age and educational advantages still had only low understanding of the new programme.

A study carried out by the I.D.C. in 1972 traced the source of this lack of understanding of the programme to the inability of the headquarters officials to communicate effectively with the local officials.<sup>2</sup> The GDAs in this case were the victims of this lack of effective communication. Otherwise they looked very informed

<sup>1</sup> I have in mind for instance the University Report 1967, 1968; the proceedings of the Kericho Conference edited by Sheffield J. as Education, Employment and Rural Development, E.A.P.H. and the many circulars from the Ministries especially, the Ministry of Finance and Planning.

<sup>2</sup> See SRDP Evaluation Report 1972 I.D.C. Occasional Paper no. 8

about general development problems in the area.

Most of them asserted the existence of the development committees but confessed that some of them were not very active. A number of points explained this situation. Firstly, there was only one CDA per location (excepting only two locations which had two each) They were, thus, unable to keep active all the committees in the location, considering that one location may have several of them (e.g. project committees, sub-locational committees and then locational committee) Secondly, the CDAs lacked quick means of transport. They depended on the use of their bicycles, for which they had no allowance. Occasionally when the bicycles were out of order they would be stranded for several weeks because often they did not have their salaries in time.

More often than not they were always paid in arrears, and even then not for all the months in question. Thirdly the Provincial administration people who could have helped to release pressure on the CDAs did not themselves seem enthusiastic enough for that task. They see their role as one of "getting things done" rather than one of "planning to get things done". Because of this, they tended to 'love' the baraza more than the self-help committees.

This situation did not change with the introduction of the SRDP. The CDAs continued to be frustrated in the payroll of the County Council which at the time was defacto bankrupt. Attempts to absorb the CDAs in the Civil Service did not materialize and has not to-date. So that though the CDAs appear to be better off by way of education, energy and dedication, their enthusiasm seemed to have waned mainly because of delays in being paid and also because of having to cover large areas.

The situation was much worse in the department of cooperatives. At the time of the study, there was only one cooperative assistant covering the two administrative divisions (in the programme area) together with a substantial part of another neighbouring division. A young man of twenty-five, with four years of service in the department behind him, he had just returned from the Kenya Institute of Administration where he had undergone a one year course on Cooperative accounting.

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His major duty as he told it to me was the supervision and inspection of the accounts of the primary societies. He had 39 Primary Societies. Of these only 13 were active and the rest were dormant. These needed revival. To do this the officer needed regular and dependable means of transport. He had none. He used public means to move around. Often he would be stranded when the month grew old (hence his pocket). Worse still there was no transport vote allocated to him. If he chose to spend his own money it took months before he was reimbursed (He told me he was talking from his experience since being employed in the department and not necessarily about a particular time and place).

Before the introduction of the programme in the area, there had been no cooperative man on the spot. The area had been run from the District Hq. some 60 miles away, which means that even prior to the time of the study the societies had lacked closer and thorough supervision and inspection of their accounts. Cases of non-payment of wages to society employees and of dues to members were very common. With very little government control, things went out of hand and that in part was responsible for the weakening of the cooperative movement in the area.

This situation did not change when the programme was introduced. The several additional staff that had been expected would be employed were not engaged immediately. There was no vehicle and even no staff housing available. This is the situation which the programme inherited. Not much in the way of progress would be expected in the circumstances.

The emerging situation in the four key departments at the point of contact with the clientele is thus one of weakness in many respects. These weaknesses could be alleviated to some extent by the divisional leadership but even at this level things were not all that favourable.

We pointed out that several factors may combine to define the effectiveness or lack of effectiveness of a particular administrative department. Among them were experience, level of education and training and availability of resources. These factors were not as conspicuous at the divisional level as they were at the locational level. While not denying altogether that they may have been important too in explaining the situation at the divisional level, I wish only to point out that there was one factor - frequent transfers of divisional

officers - that I considered very detrimental to the smooth administration of development and to the provision of effective guidance of the local staff by the divisional officials. This point is analysed in some detail in the following pages.

### III

In their 1969 Rural survey Report, Meyer et al reported that the rate of transfer of government officers was so high that it could be considered a threat to successful national development efforts. Since that time, the subject has been widely discussed in Kenya. But nobody has empirically shown how it affects the administration of development programmes. It is my intention to do that in this section and in the next one.

Of course nobody can deny the potential for bad that is implicit in frequent transfers. A government servant is a learner in the sense that he has to know the area and its people before he himself can effectively begin to teach them what to do and how to do it. Sometimes the going may become rough and the learning period may take a little longer. If this administrative gestation ('adgestation') period is quickly interrupted, a situation arises in which some officers become perpetual learners without putting their "knowledge" into any practice. Thus, at the time he is about ready to be of some use to the people, that is the time he receives his letter of transfer. As this becomes institutionalized in the government system, a situation arises in which the contribution of the government machinery becomes marginal at best.

If an administrator is all the time on the move, it becomes even more difficult to assess his effectiveness as such. This in itself has a negative implication for the national administrative system since it will be difficult to assess the total capability of the national administration for development. In a situation such as this no accurate assessment of the (qualitative) development of the administration is possible.

Sometimes frequent transfers without any clear explanation or cause may demoralize an officer. What naturally follows from this is lack of administrative commitment to an area which in turn may lead to an officer doing work of very low value or sometimes even not working at all. There was a known case where a government officer upon receiving his letter of transfer first reported 'sick' and later spent the remaining 4 weeks 'writing a handing over report'. This particular government officer was being transferred out of the area very much against his will and for no explainable reason. There have been many other cases of the like.

A high rate of transfer has also the potential for a disintegrative effect in that it does not provide for an opportunity in which a group of government officers at one particular administrative unit can stay long enough in the area to get to forge a working relationship with one another. Some officers may have the feeling that they have nothing to do with the 'Cooperative system' since they will be leaving very shortly anyway. The significance of cooperation especially at the Divisional level becomes all the more critical as one realises that there are some departments which have more resources than the others - resources which if there is cooperation, and hence coordination of activities, would be shared without the officer in question forgoing anything. Let us visualize a situation in which one department, say, Agriculture, has chronic lack of petrol and the other Dept, say, Community Development has sufficient supply. A need might arise in which the agriculture man might wish to arrange to call on some of his farmers every time the Community Development man goes out; or they might organize joint visits where their contributions are complementary (e.g. visit to a self-help cattle Dip) That kind of cooperation may not be achieved if one officer feels that "I am after all only here for a couple of months". Cooperation is likely to be obtained when there is a sense of collegiality and a feeling that "one day it will be my turn to ask for help".

In a society which is already committed to planned change, frequent transfers for government officers becomes even more. The availability of sound and accurate decisional premises which must continue to flow in the process of planning (which is viewed here as a continuous process) is likely to suffer as a result of frequent change of staff. The availability of accurate planning data depends mainly on the full understanding of the data sources by the transmitting

agency or unit. If an officer is not fully aware of what happens below him, he is apt to turn to a junior subordinate to provide the kind of information needed. The reliability of what the junior man communicates depends on what kind of information sought. If the information is one that reflects on the work of the transmitting junior staff, chances are that it will be inflated. We are all familiar with the protective character of every bureaucrat - i.e. that they will, more often than not, not pass over to their superiors any information that may adversely affect their relationships.<sup>3</sup> The chances of accurate determination of the quality of information received from the subordinates are made better if the officer stays long enough in the area and therefore knows both his source of data and the transmitting unit.

Since planning is viewed as an on-going activity, an officer who has not stayed in one area long enough may not be able to comprehend what transpired before he came. We alluded to this a short while ago when we talked of 'adjustment period' (defined as that period which an administrator needs before he can begin to discharge his duties efficiently and effectively) In planning, the officer needs to understand the decision making process that led to the establishment of this or that project. He needs to understand the relation between his dept. and adm. Unit and the centre in the context of over - all development. It is only that way that he can grapple with the difficult planning decisions that are increasingly knocking on the door of every administrator. Frequent transfer is bound to leave a vacuum.

Increasingly the integrated nature of planning in Kenya is becoming institutionalized. Departments of government are from time to time being called upon to sit together and draw up development programmes. This calls for collegueship and understanding among the various departmental heads. Frequent transfer as we have pointed out, would inhibit the attainment of that goal. There are times when a relatively senior officer is transferred to an area as a disciplinary measure. On arrival he may choose to have nothing to do with 'the systems on the spot'.

<sup>3</sup> Herbet Simon Administrative Behaviour has however pointed out that there are times when this information may be released anyway i.e. when the decision the boss makes depends on it and there is the fear that he might be able to find out the true version in the end anyway. See P. 153.

I am reminded of a relatively senior officer who was transferred to an administrative unit which he did not consider as the right one for him to operate at. While in the area, he was invited to all the dev. committee meetings in his capacity as a dept. head. He chose to have nothing to do with them. He later told me in an interview that sitting around a table in conference with his "temporal colleagues" could have meant too much condescension on his part!

The forgoing observations help to illustrate the problems implicit in frequent transfer of government officers. As the case study will shortly show, the problem is critical in some departments than in the others. It was in an attempt to assess the impact of such transfers that the study was done. The study, while being able to explain a few hypotheses as discussed here, does not claim to have answered all the relevant hypotheses.

Planning for local development is a responsibility that the Planning Statutes have given to the Provincial and the District Development Committees. An assessment of the impact of frequent transfer for Divisional development must therefore bring these administrative units into focus. The study therefore assesses the frequency of transfer at the Provincial, District and below but concentrates on the Division and below. The survey dates back to 1967 when the SRDP planning started.<sup>4</sup>

In the five departments that we identified as being key in the programme, transfers took place between January 1967 and December 1971 as indicated in the chart below. Figures show the number of departmental heads serving between 1967-1971.

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<sup>4</sup> The initial survey of the SRDP was carried out on behalf of the government by Meyer Morris and Gray Cowan in 1967 as a fore runner of the 1968 survey.



IV

	Province	District	Division	Location
Provincial Administration	2	2	10	Constant <sup>5</sup>
Agriculture	3	2	2	"
Comm. Development	3	3	5	"
Cooperatives	3	3	4	Nil <sup>6</sup>
Veterinary	3	3	3	Constant

The analysis of these figures must begin by determining what is the acceptable length of time an officer should remain in an area before he is transferred out. To do this 14 Provincial, District and Divisional heads of Department were asked what they considered a reasonable length of time an officer should remain in an area before being transferred.

Three said 1 year

Eleven said 2 years

Most of the eleven argued that a government officer needs up to one year to understand his field administrative unit. It is only in the second year they argued that he can become effective in the area. Local planners I talked to also suggested that as far as possible an officer should remain in an area for at least two years unless the transfer was in the interest of the officer (e.g. promotion). An I.D.S. evaluation report<sup>7</sup> also recommended a period of at least two years.

With that apparent consensus, it does seem that the minimum period acceptable would be two years. Accepting that as the basis our analysis one cannot say right away that from the findings, at least transfer during the period 1967-1971 does not seem to have been a problem at the Provincial and District levels. With the PC,

5. No change
6. Staff not in existence
7. R. Chambers Evaluation Report No. 2, of 1970 I.D.S. University of Nairobi 1970.

the DC and the D.A.O. in their posts for an average of 2½ years and the rest for an average of 1 year and 3 months, that could not be considered a case that warranted alarm.

The picture was however different at the Divisional level where a District Officer stayed in the area for an average of six months and a Community Development officer for an average of 1 year and cooperative officer for 1½ years. A further analysis of the "Divisional development front"<sup>8</sup> is made below.

At every administrative Unit of the Kenyan Government, the Provincial administration is assumed to be the key integrative department on matters which affect the area. On matter of collective planning at the divisional level for instance, it is the District Officer that takes the initiative to form and convene the development committees. In Migori during the period between 1967-1970 effective leadership was remarkably absent. D.O.s came and went - staying for an average of six months each time. They had no time to know the place and its people. Throughout the first planning period June 1968 - December 1969 no meeting was held at the Divisional level. In fact a Divisional Development Committee as such did not exist. Nobody had stayed long enough in the area to even think about it. When early in 1970 an enthusiastic economics graduate was posted to the area as a D.O. there was every sign here and there that he was going to revive the dying Divisional Team. He remained in the area for only three months. During that time however, he had managed to get the team meetings going. After his departure it took almost another six months before what had during his time become routine monthly meetings<sup>particular</sup> got again. In fact this officer was so adversely affected by this abrupt transfer that for weeks he stayed in the station doing almost nothing. A mobilization meeting he had planned to address the week he was told of his transfer had to be cancelled.

The frequent transfers in the Department of Community Development also affected the programme adversely. A very enthusiastic and energetic lady Asst. C.D.O. was transferred out of the area without

8. Term borrowed from L. Cliffe and John, Saul "District Development Front" see The African Review vol. 2 No. 1 June 72 pg. 65-104.

even the Provincial Comm. Development officer being warned in advance. The 2nd mobilization seminars she had been organizing for the programme after a very successful one in May 1970 had to be delayed for one full year<sup>10</sup>. This transfer was made at the time a foreign planning team (Swedish International Development Agency and FAO) was just arriving in the area to begin the work. They missed the experience (however short) of this officer. And even after her transfer, it took two months before her successor reported on duty.

The successor though enthusiastic and energetic, did not possess the tact and the persuasiveness which had made his predecessor popular in the area. He tried to push self-help Committee leaders around before he got to know the "politics" of the area well. He clashed with local politicians, whenever he addressed a gathering. They never liked him for telling them all the time that they were not hard working enough. His frequent clash with the people made him so unpopular that within months he was on his way out too - apparently at his own request. This may to some extent affirm the hypothesis that for an officer to be effective in an area he must take some time studying the area and its people before he begins to exert his authority. This "adgestation period" is very important.

The situation in the Department of Cooperatives was equally bad. The area did not have an officer until June 1969. Prior to that it had been run from Homa Bay (the District Hq.) The newly posted officer stayed in the area for only six months before being transferred. The successor stayed for only three months, and for the next four months the area had no cooperative staff. In fact the situation in this department was as bad as that in the Administration. The frequency of transfer coupled with lack of means of transport made this department one of the weakest in the area. In the face of all these, the officials of the cooperative societies lacked both training and supervision. There were cases

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9. Interviews with CDO and PDCO 1970.

10. She was transferred in May 1970 and the seminars took place in 1971.

here and there of farmers being cheated and their money being embezzled by Society officials. Payments were not being made in time and whenever it was, the farmers would queue for days at the society offices waiting.<sup>11</sup> This had a very demoralizing effect on the farmers; and the fact that 13 of the 39 registered societies were unfunctional in 1970/71 can in part be explained against that background.

Our (transfer) chart shows that there were no transfers carried out at the locational level throughout the 1967-71 period. This is not uncommon, and one major factor contributes to it. Generally, locational staff operate from their homes because of lack of accommodation for them at the locational centres. During the period under study, a number of attempts were made to transfer some locational and sub-locational agricultural staff but the persons thus affected had to return to their own communities for lack of accommodation at the would-be new stations. The development activities of the locational staff therefore do not appear to have been affected by the transfer factor. If it is true, as it is generally believed, that the location is the weakest link in the chain of hierarchy, then other factors why this is the case must be sought to explain this phenomenon - and we have attempted to do that in part II of this essay.

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11. I witnessed this with my own eyes at Oyan F.C.S. some six miles away on Migori - Kisumu road (S. Nyanza)

V

An attempt has been made in this paper to show empirically that administrative capacity in one Kenyan sub-district was too weak to sustain any conceivable development programme. We have traced this weakness to (i) irrelevant experience (ii) lack of resources (iii) lack of proper education and training (iv) frequent transfers which often deprive officers of the opportunity to know an area well enough in order to be effective.

These findings are not unique of Migori. They seem to be country wide; for civil service rules governing such things like recruitment, training etc. are the same all over the country. The picture emerges very well as one reads the substantive chapters of the National Development Plans. Special studies have also been carried out by working parties and groups of individuals which have also established the existence of some of the problems we have identified in this paper.<sup>12</sup> Since the problem seems to be national rather than local, the solutions must be found within that context. To this end a number of solutions have been suggested and tried.<sup>13</sup> I am currently studying the impact of some of these changes on the general performance of local administration. The findings will be reported in a later communication. Meanwhile further investigations into this problem are encouraged from interested scholars.

12. See e.g. Ministry of Agriculture (Kenya) - "Final Report of the working Party on Agricultural Extension Services", November 1970 which outlined the major shortcomings of the Extension services and suggested a number of solutions.

13. e.g. (1) The introduction of a training scheme to up-grade the lot of the poor but trainable junior extension staff.

(2) Release of additional resources to make the local staff mobile.

(3) Introduction of supervision and control devices to check on effectiveness of local staff and organizations etc.

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