

Abstract

An Assessment of the “The Task Force Approach” in Agricultural Development in Montserrat, St. Kitts and Nevis

Samuel Powell

The study sought to describe and document the *modus operandi* of the Task Force in Montserrat, St. Kitts and Nevis, to identify the factors which contributed to its functioning and to examine the impact of the Task Force Approach on the agricultural sector. It also sought to describe the characteristics of the extension officers and the farmers who were involved in this approach.

A questionnaire developed by the researcher was used to collect data. A random sample of 15 farmers involved with the task force (target farmers) and 15 non-target farmers were interviewed in each country. Personnel from research, extension, policy, credit and marketing were interviewed to ascertain how the task force functioned and what strategies were used to promote agricultural development. Statistical procedures such as cross tabulations and the calculation of frequencies were used to better describe the characteristics of the farmers and extension officers. Chi-square analysis was used to ascertain if there were any significant differences in the characteristics of the target and the non-target farmers.

The data revealed that several institutions/units were formally brought together as a team in each island to focus on developing crops which had potential for commercialization. The strategies used to realize this goal on each island were

modified to suit country specific needs.

The strategies used by the team have made a positive impact on the agricultural sector. Inter-sectoral linkages have been formed and maintained, institutional strengthening has occurred, extension and research do joint field visits, critical production inputs were purchased in bulk and sold to farmers, regional exports of target crops and the formation of farmers commodity groups and associations were achieved. Farmers have realized an increase in their farm income and the target farmers have indicated that their progress in agriculture is due to the assistance given by the team.

Several factors that were critical to the successful functioning of the task force were identified. These include persons on the task force must have the authority to make final decisions; there must be strong policy support for the decisions taken by the task force; there must be communication among members and providing feedback fuels this process and the production systems should be market-led.

In conclusion, it is recommended that the task force concept needs to be used in the further development of other agricultural sectors; the task forces should be responsible to a coordinating committee and the approach should be tested in larger countries where the characteristics would be different from those of Montserrat, St. Kitts and Nevis.