Guatemala Project ACCD Team

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Book Report:

Summary of Services for the Urban Poor, A People Centered Approach

By George McRobie

The article 'Services for the Urban Poor, A People-Centered Approach, written by George McRobie, a distinguished Consultant on appropriate Technology implementation in third world countries in Africa, Asia, and South America, is a sort of summary of the experiences he has accumulated. In the report, he draws on these experiences, creating a series of succinct case study based examples of implementation of technologies for a broad range of problems that may be encountered in mostly urban sections of third world cities occupied by poor local inhabitants, although he also touches on rural infrastructure planning and implementation issues.

Mc Robie then dedicates the second part of the report to the accurate description of what he sees as the appropriate approaches and tactics to motivate, instruct, involve, and empower local communities to implement new technologies and techniques that humanitarian teams advocate, as well as five case studies of the implementation of different infrastructure modification projects in five different locations in the world.

In all, 'Services for the Urban Poor, A People-Centered Approach' is a great base reference guide to be valued by anyone involved in Humanitarian activities with a desire to make a truly lasting, non invasive, and locally culturally sensitive impact on the areas they are intervening in.

Report Focus: Notes on 'Design of a Community Based Program

McRobie describes a sequence of steps he believes are most effective in the process of evaluation and implementation of community based projects.

The central concern , according to him, is the creation of a sound communication channel with the community through the careful selection of a male and female intermediary from the community. This intermediary needs to have a great ability to effectively communicate with the intervening party and with the locals, as well as a profound understanding of the local issues that need to be addressed. He stresses the secondary nature of the technical training, which could be afforded to the intermediary once there is a verification of his or her validity.

The second concern, the system of data collection to be implemented in order to properly evaluate the situation at hand, has the following sequence:

-Evaluation of present levels of service

-Evaluation of potential serious deficiencies

-Potential for new development

-likely demand for service

-financial and institutional capacity to meet potential demand

-evaluation of public agency capacity to expand and absorb potential service implementation

After the establishment of a solid data collection, there would need to be a three phase process for the application of plans; A demonstration phase , including a pilot scheme to demonstrate the feasibility of any plans and gage community reactions; a consolidation phase involving the development of various refinements to the project as well as the planning of greater involvement of government entities in long term maintenance plans, as well as the creation of community organizations to aid in the same objectives; and the expansion phase, involving the expansion of the program through adjacent community involvements, training, and the use of various media outlets to disseminate the ideas in the project and build good will and cultural acceptance toward the project.

In conclusion, McRobie provides an invaluable set of concise insights that are most likely going to be invaluable once the need to quickly evaluate future projects becomes a reality. His suggestions are insightful but he encourages the careful research that would possibly lead to solutions other than the ones he has outlined, providing a great structure for info collection and implementation.