

CHAPTER FOUR

A COMPOSITE FAILURE

If the Furcy and Fort-Jacques experiences constitute examples of encouraging success, I have also encountered other projects which must qualify as general failures. Rather than provide a humdrum account of several different projects which ran into different sorts of technical and organizational problems, I will present a composite picture in the form of a single project reconstructed from the details of several projects. Each of the events described in this composite was actually found to have occurred on one or another project. The important dynamics concern, not terraces, but trees.

4.1 A Project Begins

The foreign technicians contracted by the Organization arrive in country. In addition to a general administrator and field chief of project, there is a soils specialist, an agronomist, a livestock specialist, a nursery and forestry specialist, and a soil conservation specialist. At the same time a search is being made for a community development specialist. The team is charged with the task of collaborating with Ministry of Agriculture counterparts on a general rural development project in the Region, placing special emphasis on the problem of soil conservation in the watershed surrounding the river that irrigates the Plain.

The first question to be resolved concerns the lodging of the foreign team. It was part of their workscope that they should live, not in Port-au-Prince, but in the Region where the project will occur. Apart from this stipulation, they are free to choose their own lodging arrangements.

The project is to occur in the rural areas of a small town some 20 kilometers from a larger provincial capital. The two most logical choices of residence, from the point of view of project efficiency, would be to live either in one of the major rural communities to be serviced by the project, or to live in the small town which is the administrative center for those rural regions. But other factors intrude, including the question of general living standards. The team of foreign technicians agree that they should live in close proximity to each other. But two of them have their families with them, including small children; and one of the wives, on seeing the town, flatly declares that she refuses to live there. Thus the decision is tilted toward residence, neither in the town, nor in any of the project villages, but in the provincial capital.

But their Haitian counterparts had been instructed by the Ministry of Agriculture that they were to live, not in the provincial capital, but in the project town. Thus a split living arrangement occurs, in which the Haitian technicians are living in the project community and the foreign technicians are commuting every day from the provincial capital.

A project office had been set up in the town. But the residence of the foreign technicians in the provincial capital makes it convenient for the project to have an office there as well. At first the town office was the central office, the capital office a subsidiary. Within half a year, however, the weight had shifted. The office located in the provincial capital now became the central office of the project.

In the meantime the project begins. Several activities are undertaken simultaneously: demonstration plots, livestock improvement, nursery planting, and soil conservation.

#### 4.2 The Question of Payment

For all of these projects the question arises as to how cooperation will be elicited and sustained among the rural population. But a program decision had already been taken long before the arrival of the foreign experts and their Haitian counterparts: huge quantities of food would be made available.

The salaries of the foreign technicians came, of course, in the form, not of food, but of dollars. The Haitian technicians were paid monthly checks which made their way through several Ministries. A small amount of funding would be made available to pay occasional salaries of field assistants as the need arose. But in principle the labor provided by the peasants was to be paid in the form of food.

Everyone concerned realized that the peasants would simply convert this food into money, and some of the foreign technicians wondered whether it might not be simpler, and certainly less demeaning, to pay in the form of cash wages. But the decision to import massive quantities of food for work as remuneration was one which was made at higher administrative levels beyond the reach of the contracted technicians and under the impulse of overseas pressures and lobbies of which the project personnel had only the dimmest awareness. The team was presented with a fait accompli: peasant wages were to be paid in food.

A few of the foreign technicians had had original misgivings about paying any wages to the peasants for their participation in this sort of development project. The project was for their own benefit. The payment of wages was in strict violation of the voluntaristic, self-help community development principles which they had learned about in their own developmental training. But their Haitian counterparts, at least some of whom had been working for Damien on other projects, assured them that the Haitian peasant would respond only under the stimulus of some such incentive. As to the issue of whether the use of food might not be demeaning, it was pointed out that-- although there would be virtually unanimous preference for cash wages--the poverty of the countryside was such that many peasants would vie for the privilege of working even for a few pounds of cornmeal and a bit of cooking oil every day. Don't worry: the food for work will elicit the necessary cooperation.

### 4.3 Establishing Initial Contact

The initial contacts between project personnel and peasants were, at least superficially, cordial in character. Since none of the foreigners yet spoke Creole, the initial contacts were made by the Damien technicians, who explained to the peasants that a large foreign organization had chosen their region as a target for several types of help. In their conversations with peasants of the mountain communities of the watershed, the technicians explained that the main problem that the blan were concerned about was the problem of soil erosion. All the trees had been cut down, explained the technicians, and as a result rich soil had been washed downstream into the river, causing problems in the lowland irrigation system. What the blan wanted to do now was to help the peasants fill the hillsides with trees again and to show them how to build walls on their land which would prevent the soil from washing down in the future.

The peasants were courteous. They were well aware of the decline in soil fertility which had come over the decades and were not totally unaware of the fact that this decline was not unrelated to the water "washing" soil down the slopes. In response to their explanations, the project technicians would invariably receive a courteous, collective "Sé sa. Lap bon anpil" from their peasant audience. ("That's fine. It's a great idea.") But in their conversations among themselves, many of the peasants expressed deep concern about the notion of the blan coming to plant trees on their land. This particular region had had not so pleasant experiences with an American-run SHADA rubber project back in the forties. Stated in a blunt fashion, there was

an openly expressed concern that the plan, with the cooperation of the Haitian Government, might have as their final objective the eventual expropriation of the land in this particular region. The planting of the trees was seen as a possible first step in the assertion of proprietary rights.

But this was a suspicion, a fear, not a conviction. When the Damien technicians indicated that as part of the project there would be regular payment of ti-nouriti for those who participated with their time and labor, genuine enthusiasm began to be felt for the project. The situation appeared to be imbued with ambivalence. On the one hand was the suspicion surrounding outsiders bearing gifts of trees: on the other hand, there was fear that, by resisting, the communities in the region might drive away the project, causing the Food for Work benefits to go to some other region.

What is important, however, and what was to determine the course of the project, was the fact that the peasants saw as the principal benefit not the content of the project itself but the food which would be paid as an incidental adjunct to the project. It is this characteristic which paves the way for project disaster.

#### 4.4 The Demonstration that Failed

The work began on many fronts. The foreign and Haitian agronomists had as part of their mandate the establishing of demonstration gardens in which they would prove to the peasants that they could obtain higher yields from their traditional crops if they would simply change their cropping technology. Unlike earlier projects in the Port-Jacques

area, which had taught peasants to grow new cash crops, the project here emphasized the extraction of greater yields from their traditional crops.

The first task was to identify a body of peasants who could be said to be part of the project. Those willing to cooperate were formed into a groupman agrikol. As has so often happened, the better off farmers tended to be the ones who took the risk of participating. The next task was to secure land where the gardens could be grown. In one community a number of farmers with contiguous plots combined part of their plots into a temporary "communal garden." In another community, the project had to rent land.

The experimental corn gardens did not fare very well. The young Haitian agronomist in charge had actually had very little field experience. He was the son of a well-to-do Port-au-Prince family who had originally wanted to be a physician but who, on being unable to enter medical school, took advantage of a favor and entered Damien to pursue the career of agronomy, though he had never held a hoe in his life. The book learning which formed the basis of the counsels which he and his foreign counterpart gave to the peasants was based for the most part on lowland agriculture in industrialized settings. In addition to introducing fertilizer, they tried to teach the peasants two other "improvements." One was to plant the corn on the top of furrows, rather than beneath ground level, as the mountain peasants do. The second was to discontinue intercropping their corn with other crops and to grow instead pure stands of corn.

The results of these "improvements" introduced by the experts earned for them the stifled laughter of many of the peasants behind their backs. The hillside corn grown on furrows suffered from lack of moisture. On irrigated lowlands, it makes sense to raise the corn to prevent exposure to excessive moisture. But on mountain slopes the problem is the opposite: water quickly drains off, and the task is to plant the corn as low as possible to secure for it the maximum amount of quickly vanishing moisture. And as for monocropping the peasants continue to be correctly convinced that the benefits they extract from a garden where corn, millet, manioc, sweet potatoes, and congo peas are intercropped far exceeds the income and food they can generate from a monocropped corn plot. As for the fertilizer, the ears of corn were larger. But the technicians had neglected some simple calculations which the peasants implicitly make in deciding whether to invest in fertilizer or not. Only in certain very special cash crops--such as vegetables or coffee--will the income from fertilizer-augmented yields justify the investment. In a traditional crop such as corn, increased local yields will simply produce a post-harvest glut which knocks the bottom out of the market, making it difficult for the peasant to recoup his investment. The demonstration plots merely demonstrated to the peasants that not all agronom were so clever after all. Within a short time the communal gardens were disbanded, the groupman agrikol ceased to function, and the entire matter passed into silent oblivion.



4.5 The Building of Walls

Not so the soil conservation element of the project. As in the case of agricultural extension, the soil conservationists first had to teach the techniques, and the teaching was to be done in the context of a demonstration field. The first task, after forming a groupman of local peasants interested in participating, was to secure a plot of ground on which they could erect bench terraces, retaining walls, contour canals, mini-terraces, vegetal barriers, ravine check-dams, and other elements in the armament of soil conservationists. (Reforestation was to come only later.) But nobody was willing at first to subject any of their plots of ground to these bizarre, probably irreversible manipulations. The technicians were chagrined. Their understanding was that they were offering free land-improvement services and that peasants would vie with each other for the privilege of having their land treated. The peasants viewed it quite differently. They were exposing their land to risks. They were eager for the project--with its Food for Work and its promise of other inputs-- to favor and focus upon their communities; but they would have preferred that it be done without directly risking their land.

Eventually the president of the groupman, a relatively well-to-do farmer, acceded to the wishes of the project technicians and turned over a plot of agriculturally marginal ground to be treated with bench terraces, miniterraces, vegetal barriers, and other erosion control devices. This followed a paradoxical pattern that was to dominate numerous soil conservation projects. The protective structures

should logically be placed on land that is still worth protecting--i.e. on the best agricultural land. But because early treatments tend to be done on land reluctantly granted by peasants, these treatments will be given to parts of what are the worst land in the community, providing an eloquent symbol of the gap between project rhetoric and project reality.

The work began. The first task was to construct bench terraces and dry walls. Nobody in this region had ever seen or heard of such structures. But after the second or third day, a devastating secret (embarrassing or hilarious, depending on one's point of view) was revealed. None of the technicians, Haitian or foreign, knew anything about terrace or wall building either. It was at this point that the Haitian conservation specialist, eager to learn, found out that his foreign counterpart was in fact a Sociologist, with a degree from the Sorbonne, who couldn't tell a terrace from a sand dune. The walls were falling down as soon as they were put up.

The project director, when informed of this fact, hastily organized an expedition to the Fort-Jacques area. The technicians and about a half dozen local peasant leaders spent several weeks learning soil conservation techniques from the now proficient peasant wall builders of Fort Jacques. On returning to their home region, they resumed the terracing, now with a great deal more technical competence.

There were motivational problems right from the outset. In theory different groups of peasants from surrounding communities would rotate their labor, maximizing the training experience throughout the region. But at this point the foreign project directors were being very parsimonious in the quantities of food that they were giving for participation. The peasants, in calculating the worth of the reward, computed the market value of their daily food ration. At the then prevailing payment rate, they would be receiving less than two gourdes a day--a not attractive sum even for rural Haiti. Furthermore, the Food for Work option is attractive to the peasant only if he is allowed to work in month long stretches, at the end of which he will receive perhaps 100 pounds of wheat or cornmeal and a large quantity of oil and sardines. But the practice of rotating labor on these early demonstration plots combined with the already low daily rate to seriously reduce the attractiveness of the entire endeavour to the peasant participants. The result was a discouraging absenteeism rate.

Once again we see a gap between the technician's focus and that of the peasants. The project technicians saw themselves as bringing a needed message of soil conservation; the community saw them as bringing Food for Work, and--at least initially--was willing to tolerate the messages and the strange lessons to see where all this might lead to in terms of project inputs.

4.6 The Unwanted Grass

Eventually the time for demonstrations had ceased, and the time for serious action on the region's hillsides began. Different communities were subjected to different types of interventions. Of particular interest is the sequence of events that unfolded in the community that had been earmarked for coverage by vegetative barriers. This community was characterized by the absence of rocks, rendering it unsuitable for wall-building treatments. For reasons that are now buried in an unretrievable past (the decision-making technicians have now departed), the project decided to cover the hillsides of this region with carefully spaced rows of citronel, an oil producing grass, as barriers against soil erosion.

The peasants of the community, as far as can be determined through retrospective interviews, had absolutely no say in this matter. Few of them had ever even heard of citronel and even fewer knew of its commercial use. The technicians assured the peasants that citronel was a popular source of manufacturing oil for airplane lubrication--all that was needed was a factory in the region, and they would have a ready market for the grass that was now to be placed on their land.

The sequence of events that followed is one of the more disturbing patterns that was found to occur in several soil conservation projects studied during this research.

The project began by asking permission of the local residents to begin the planting. In the beginning the project organizers met with flat refusals. Eventually they found a few willing households in one community, and the work began. Now the task was to organize the planting itself. In these matters the foreign technicians were for the most part helpless and had to turn matters over to their Haitian counterparts. But even the Haitian technicians themselves were outsiders to the communities, with no real insights into local social organization.

One would have thought that the question of the organization of the project would have been considered essential, that efforts would have been made to create coherent local groups on the basis of some community principle, either common residence or contiguous landholdings, or some such. But the time-consuming steps necessary to achieve this were never taken. The project rather opted for the formation of simple work-gangs (ékip).

The composition of the work gangs was one of the most resented aspects of the project. Though lip service was given to the principle of employing community labor, in fact a substantial percentage of each work gang was composed of total outsiders who had managed to work themselves onto the payroll. In a large number of cases the very peasant whose land was being covered by the undesirable citronel was refused employment. And we are left then with the following

vignette of community development in its most bizarre form: the picture of an angry peasant watching a gang of paid outsiders invading his land to plant a grass of whose marketability he was justifiably dubious and toward whose erosion-control utility he was both skeptical and indifferent.

The term "invade" is by no means an overstatement. The principle of asking permission was quickly abandoned as the work got under way and the food started flowing. Early project timidity about offending peasants was quickly abandoned, and local foremen began walking and speaking as though bolstered by the authority of the State, threatening imprisonment to any farmer who attempted to prevent the planting of his land in citronel, and threatening with fines the farmer who pulled it up, burnt it off, or let his animals consume it. In the face of a massive flow of Food for Work and the commitment of enthusiastic laborers who would have been willing to plant the entire nation in citronel, the peasant was helpless to object.

Not all of the peasants wanted to resist; many reportedly saw the value of the citronel, at least in terms of its erosion control function. But the important point is that this was irrelevant to the progress of the project. Once matters got rolling and the payrolls collected, the project lost any pretence of being a community development project. It was more in the nature of a public works project mandated by State authority.

To this day many peasants in the region still refer to the grass as citronel léta (the Government's citronel) or citronel blan (the foreigner's citronel). Many, probably most, have by now lost their fear that the foreigners will come in and take away the land. But remarks I overheard indicate that at least some peasants still suspect that one day an airplane oil factory will be set up in the region and the blan will come back at long last to claim and harvest their now flourishing citronel.

Were the foreign technicians aware of the coercive nature of much of what was occurring, or of the land tenure anxieties which dominated the conversations of many of the peasants? I seriously doubt it. My impression is that, with a number of fortunate exceptions, the average foreign technician or administrator in Haiti generally remains unaware of such dynamics, is content rather to restrict his attention to the technical matter at hand--e.g. finding the best variety of citronel--leaving these messy social and organizational problems in the hands of his Haitian subordinates. The success of his work in Haiti will be judged first and foremost by the number of linear kilometers of citronel which he has planted. As long as the citronel continues to be planted, there will be an understandable tendency on his part to not probe too deeply into the organizational tactics being employed to achieve this end.

4.7 Enter the Trees

Other communities in the Region had been earmarked for a different treatment, one whose principal element was the planting, not of vegetative barriers, but of different species of trees, in combination with dry walls (in the case of rocky land) or mini-terraces of one meter's breadth (in the case of land with no rocks)

As the project was originally conceived, the tree planting element of the project would be the shared responsibility of both the forester, who would be responsible for the nursery, and the community development specialist, who would be responsible for preparing the community for the reception of the trees. But the community development specialist was more than six months late in his arrival.

The late arrival of his colleague did not in the least deter the forester, whose scope of work indicated that he was to prepare a nursery. Soon after his arrival in Haiti, the nursery was underway. Roads up into the watershed were either poor or non-existent and the programmatically most sensible procedure would have been to locate the nursery in as close a proximity as possible to the watershed where they were eventually to be planted, reducing thus the transportation problem. But in this matter the forester's hands were tied. A decision had been taken to locate the nursery on a governmentally owned farm that was several hours away from the watershed itself.



The forester did not make too much of a fuss about this. His task was to produce a good nursery; this could be done just as easily on the government farm as on a plot of ground more convenient to the watershed. The problem of transportation would be somebody else's. His task was to get a nursery started, and that's what he would do.

He was also unconcerned about the absence of his community development colleague who was supposed to be organizing the communities for the reception of the trees. His job as a forester was to produce a nursery. The organization of the community was somebody else's responsibility. He himself had been brought to Haiti to produce a nursery, and that's what he would do.

And that's what he did. Within two years after his arrival in Haiti, his well organized nursery had over 100,000 seedlings, most of them fruit trees, most of them planted in bags. His choice of species had been determined very casually. Since his task was the nursery, his visits to the watershed were rare and his knowledge of local agriculture, local land tenure, and even local tree preferences was at best spotty.

By the time the community development specialist arrived, the nursery was already advanced, and the trees would soon have to be planted. The newly arrived technician quickly learned Creole and spent most of his time in the watershed, trying to familiarize himself with local peasant agriculture, and trying to prepare the way for the imminent planting of the trees. The peasants showed a

courteous interest when hearing of the trees, but the technician nervously suspected that he and his colleague were going to have trouble unloading 100,000 trees.

But he had not anticipated the extent of the difficulty. A date was set for the delivery of the first batch of trees. The president of a previously formed local Community Council was asked to call a meeting for that day. The two technicians would have several thousand trees transported into the watershed and would give demonstrations as to the proper techniques for planting them.

On the appointed day, the trees and technicians arrived. But the audience consisted of some half dozen peasants, at least three of whom had been nervously collared by the president at the last minute to show up at the meeting. Stifling any disappointment they might have felt, the technicians gave their demonstration. The young trees, still in their sacks, were deposited by the roadside. After the demonstration, one of the technicians, with a gesture of his arm, said to the peasants, "They're all yours now. You and your neighbors can take them and plant them wherever you want." The peasants thanked them, waved goodbye as the technicians drove off, and returned to their homes.

The community development technician returned to the community several weeks later. (The forester never returned to see the fate of his trees. His job had been to grow them in the nursery. It was someone else's job to see that they were planted.) The technician

had not expected a mad rush on the trees. But he was crushed to learn that virtually all of the trees were still by the roadside exactly where he had left them. The roots of many of the plants had already started to burst through the sacks. Somewhat flustered he asked some bystanders why they hadn't planted the trees. The man hemmed and hawed, pointing out that the farmers were waiting for further instructions, weren't really interested in these varieties of trees, didn't really need that many trees, maybe just one or two per household, and in general couldn't afford to fill their cropping land with trees. The denouement to this was the ultimate destruction of some 60,000 nursery trees which were soon to pass the stages of possible transplanting.

#### 4.8 The Systematization of Tree Pushing

In the context of Haitian soil conservation projects, this situation --that of a nursery filled with trees whose ultimate destination is somewhat in question--was distressingly common. But the strategy employed here by this project to move the trees--that of simply leaving it up to individual peasants to come and take trees as they wished reforestation--was somewhat unusual. The vast majority of reforestation programs in rural Haiti have made tree planting the responsibility, not of individual farmers, but of organized community groups.

In view of the resounding failure to move the trees by offering them to individual farmers, the Project quickly changed its tactics. Trees would henceforth be planted by teams of paid workers. The wages, of course, would be in the form of the Food for Work that had already made possible certain earlier phases of the project.

The offer of Food for Work, as was to be expected, elicited the enthusiastic approval of hundreds of local peasants, quite eager to labor for a marketable commodity which they would, with little trouble, be able to convert into cash. Some of the peasants commented among themselves that they would rather be paid in cash--and indeed it was reported that another community in the region, in the context of another project, had insisted that payment be made, not in food, but in money. But no such movement caught hold among these peasants. Project technicians appointed certain local leaders as foremen, responsible for organizing the teams.

Unlike the teams that had been formed for the planting of the citronel, these teams tended to be composed only of local residents, the main concession being that, for training purposes, members of other communities that would eventually be involved in the project could send one or two individuals to participate in the work.

An unusual feature of this project was the tactic of systematically combining of tree planting with the building of walls, terraces, and other structures. Most earlier projects had separated the two activities. Much of the tree planting being done in Haiti involves simply that, with no systematic attempt to treat the reforested

hillsides with other types of erosion control structures. And conversely, the famous terrace-building projects of Fort-Jacques restricted treatment of land to these earth works. The small bit of reforestation that was done there was done on a separate block of State land. The Project here, however, would carry out both types of activities more or less simultaneously, depending of course on the availability of rain and the availability of trees from the nursery.

#### 4.9 The Problem of Reluctant Land Owners

The promise of Food for Work completely removed the problem of finding labor to plant the trees. But the question of where the trees would be planted had still not been solved. Even individuals who were willing to work in the teams would have preferred that the trees be planted on land other than their own. Certain apparently contradictory messages they were receiving from project animators made them uneasy about the entire endeavour. For example the farmers were told, on the one hand, that the trees were theirs, to use as they wished. But they were warned on the other hand to protect the trees, to avoid tying animals near the trees, under pain of having the animal impounded to be rescued only on payment of a fine. An ambiguous arrangement such as this created the impression in the minds of at least some farmers that in fact the trees were not theirs, that they belonged to, and would continue to belong to, the Project, and that the entire project might conceivably be a mere prelude to a plan

on the part of the blan and the State to eventually take the land away from the peasants.

In the course of my research, I was impressed at the frequency with which I heard this fear in different parts of the country. The genuineness of the fear is supported by another pattern--the practice of referring to the development organization as the Company. It would have surprised at least some of the idealistic foreign technicians to learn that the peasants taxonomically lumped their development organization into the same category with private, profit-making companies. This simple but revealing linguistic pattern buttresses the frequently expressed fears of the peasants about eventually losing their land. Certain peasants who were willing to cooperate with the blan in the beginning of the tree planting activities came under verbal attack from some of their neighbors. Pinga ou mete blan nan peyi-a. Kounyea yo mande'-ou. Min pi ta yo anik mache'-pran. Don't help the foreigners get a foothold here. Now they're asking your permission. Later on they'll just take what they want.

But local community leaders, who had been placed in various leadership positions within the project, assuaged the fears of their more timorous neighbors, and the project proceeded.

To play it safe, the first trees were planted, not on private property, but along the roads and paths. The survival rate of the trees was virtually zero; roadsides and pathways are the only place

that peasants with little land to spare can pasture their livestock. But since the Food for Work was given on the basis, not of trees that survive, but of trees that are planted, the work went on.

But the capacity of the roadsides to absorb trees is very low; the forester running the nursery was urging the project director to order the planting of more trees; and the soil conservation component of the program was lagging. The demonstration plot had been filled with bench terraces, rock walls, contour canals, vegetative barriers, and mini-terraces. It was time to begin passing from demonstration to action.

Thus a number of strong executive directives came down ordering quicker progress. By this time the Haitian field technicians were in effective charge of the project, the foreign technicians restricting their involvement to occasional site visits. The order to move more quickly came from the foreign project director. The Haitian technicians were puzzled as to how to proceed, since community members, though generally eager to participate in the Food for Work activities, were on the whole reluctant to have their own land treated by the project. The project director had no practical suggestions to make on the matter; this was the problem of the field technicians.

As might be expected the problem was solved in a manner not unlike that of the citronel affair: the technicians simply pointed to a

block of land and the work teams moved in. Most of the landowners eventually capitulated, since most of them were employed on the project. One landowner who tried to obstruct entry into his land was actually brought before a judge. The prevailing project stance was: this is a government project for the common good and no individual has the right to block it.

As a result the walls were built and the trees were planted. The project employed local watchmen (gadyin) to patrol the treated hillsides and to report on any cases of animals being allowed to destroy the walls or trees. Their work was not effective against the pressure created by the need to pasture livestock. And in fact no farmer was prosecuted for the destruction of walls or trees. The economic logic of this is patent. Farmers who refused initial entry into their fields were in effect partially blocking the flow of Food for Work. Hence the stimulus for strong action. But there were no collective payoffs arranged to preserve the trees or structures. The group payoffs were for constructing and planting, not for maintaining. Thus the hiring of a handful of watchmen proved to be an ineffective measure, within several months the walls had succumbed to the livestock and the hillsides of certain communities were as treeless as they had been before the project ever started.



#### 4.10 The Root of the Failure

Few developmental professionals would hesitate in describing the above project as a failure. Disagreement would arise, however, as to the precise nature of the malady. Some individuals with whom I have discussed these projects interpret the failure as a dramatic illustration of the disasters created by using wage labor or Food for Work as the basis for development projects.

This is not a straw argument; many concerned professionals would adhere to it. But I must vigorously disagree. The project described above is ridden with a number of defects; but its most devastating weakness is not the presence of remuneration but the absence of project objectives from which the peasants perceive a genuine short-term economic payoff for themselves. The problem of fear of expropriation adds a complicating element. But I have seen projects founder even where I found no evidence of this particular fear. The major weakness in this project, the central difference between this fiasco and the successful erosion control innovations of the Furcy farmers, hinges around the presence or absence of self-sustaining profit generating opportunities in the project's offerings.

The project described above emphasized the goal of "protecting soil." Even the trees were conceptualized in that light. The economic utility of the trees to the farmers was pointed out, but it was clearly a secondary theme in a concert dominated by the theme of preventing erosion as the central project objective. But this theme has simply not proven sufficiently cogent to elicit and sustain

profound, long term changes in the peasant's economic behavior. The case of Furcy demonstrates that the Haitian peasant is fully capable of such changes--but further suggests that it takes the incentive of profits to motivate the requisite investments of time, labor, and money.

I will discuss the pro's and con's of payment in a later section of the report. Here it will suffice to point out that the absence of payment in the above project would certainly not have made the project succeed. On the contrary, a case can be made to the effect that under certain circumstances payment can help convert what would otherwise be total fiascoes into at least modest successes.

To illustrate, it should be recalled that the above project was a reconstructed composite of several projects studied during the research. One of the actual projects was fortunate in having the services of a dynamic Haitian animator, skilled in both agronomy and soil conservation techniques, who had been a longstanding resident of the rural area where he was eventually employed by the project.

The project in question followed the outline of the project described here, including initial coercion, fear of expropriation, and Food for Work. But the animator in question experimented and persisted in a way that his counterparts in other projects did not. Of particular importance, he introduced into the project a number of fast growing wood trees such as bwa blan, bwa ple, and tcha tcha

already known to the peasants as handy sources of cash to the proprietor fortunate enough to have a few growing wild on his land. He furthermore--behind the back of the project director--started a local nursery of these trees, reducing dependence on the project nursery. And most importantly, he experimented with several different spacing strategies, eventually hitting on one which made tree planting compatible with simultaneous livestock grazing on a plot of ground. All of this was done on his own.

The result was that some seven or eight years after the project has initiated, while it was still in progress, the wood trees were getting impressively large, a handful of peasants had started making money on them, and other communities in the area asked him to begin the project in their area as well. Resistance to trees had virtually disappeared in the area. The project was not a total success. That is, the peasants are still not independently planting trees on their own as a cash crop, and the invitation from the other community had a large element of Food for Work interest involved in addition to interest in trees. But the changed attitude toward trees and the new openness of the peasants toward participation in the project must be counted as a partial success. In fact some of the most vehement early resisters are now among the most vehement advocates of a return of the project.

It must be pointed out that, this partial success occurred only because the project first barreled in cajoling and paying its way to completion. But the lesson from this is not that initial coercion

might be justifiable--I will suggest below that there are better ways of beginning--but that even a poorly run project will have some hopes of success if the peasants are convinced that they will make a profit from learning the behaviors (in this case tree planting) which the project is teaching.

The remainder of the report will thus assume that the major determinant of the success or failure of soil conservation is the presence or absence of convincing profit incentives, not in terms of the project wages or Food for Work, but in terms of the very behaviors which the project seeks to impart. The report will further attempt to argue that, with proper planning of a type that no project in Haiti has yet done, the trees themselves can serve as the required source of impressive short-term profits. But it would be a gross oversimplification to let the matter rest there.

The profit dimension is the major determinant of success or failure. But by no means is it the sole determinant. We still have to assess the impact of the institutional, organizational, technical, and sociocultural factors alluded to in the introduction to this report. The following four sections of this report will discuss, in as succinct a fashion as possible, the manner in which each of these four types of variables exerts its own impact on the outcome of soil conservation efforts.