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# Common Mistakes in Agricultural Development and a Key to Success

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Roland Bunch spoke at ECHO's Agricultural Conference in 2003. Below we summarize his talk.

Development is a) a process of people learning to solve their own problems, b) sustainably. It means progressing from one problem to another. Agricultural development is possible in more ways and climates than people often think.

## Some Common Mistakes

Often if you look at a graph of yield of a particular crop during a specific program, the yield rises but then drops again when programs leave.

One very common mistake is trying to do too many things at once. Successes tend to happen with very simple, limited technologies. Walk beside people, don't run ahead. Farmers can't take risks and will only pick one or two changes. If each picks a different one, there will be no consensus, and consensus is extremely important in rural communities. It is better to teach one idea to hundreds of people than to teach a hundred ideas to one person. Stick with simple, limited technologies in order to reach a critical mass. You need 35 - 40% of people in support of something to change the whole community.

Another common mistake is providing give-aways, donations, and subsidies. In this situation, people feel that development happens to them. People become accustomed to receiving. The donations become crutches, and can reduce the multiplier effect. Giving things away changes the development workers' approach, too. They are more likely to begin dictating.

A third common mistake is failing to check the economic feasibility of a particular technology (e.g. compost is uneconomical to use for basic grains).

## A Key to Success

A simple technology is best. Farmers need to be able to adapt it before they will adopt it. If a technology is not changing, it is—or will be—low-productivity. There needs to be constant change and constant innovation. Simple technologies should be simple to teach and simple to adapt. Motivate and teach farmers to experiment.