

A comparison of rural community development strategies in Saskatchewan and North Dakota

Maxwell Ofosuhene
University of Saskatchewan

Abstract: As far back as the 1950s and 1960s, the attention of many governments in the developed world was drawn to the ongoing rural transformation processes and their associated problems. Consequently attempts were made to create development programmes and strategies in order to deal with rural decline in many developed countries such as Britain, France, Canada and the United States. This study was undertaken to analyze rural community development (RCD) programmes in two different political but similar geographic regions in North America: Saskatchewan in Canada and North Dakota in the United States. The goal of the study is to understand some of the underlying theories, philosophies, strategies, and agents of various RCD policies and programmes that have been implemented in these selected regions during the period 1960 to 1995. The purpose of the study is three-fold: first, to identify different development strategies; to understand the factors which are responsible for such differences; and finally, to examine the relative impact of various RCD approaches adopted in both study areas. Two major development strategies, which feature prominently in this study, include top-down and bottom-up development approaches.

Introduction

Whereas researchers, planners and governments in Canada and the United State have examined changes in the rural sector and devised various development strategies, few have compared and contrasted such approaches in order to gain greater insight into their applicability within various contexts. This study attempts to compare the differences and similarities, if any, that exist between

two different political units, Saskatchewan (Canada) and North Dakota (United States), which are located in the same geographical region, the Great Plains of North America. This paper has been divided into five major sections. In the first section the purpose and objective of the research is presented, followed by the methodology of the research in section two. A chronological presentation of some of the major federal and provincial/state rural/community, regional and economic development policies and programmes initiated in the two study areas, especially since the 1960s to 1995, is provided in section three. Section four compares the information obtained from field research to identify features of divergence and convergence that exist between RCD programmes in the study areas. The final section presents some of the major findings of the research.

Purpose and Objectives of Research

This study compares the theoretical approaches and RCD strategies adopted by Saskatchewan and North Dakota during the period 1960 - 1995. Specifically, the research attempts to identify any difference in strategies, to distinguish those factors responsible for such differences and to assess the relative impact of variable approaches to rural development adopted in these two study areas.

The main objectives of this research project are:

- to identify the types of RCD strategies that have been used in each of the studied areas and to understand the theory and philosophies underlying the adoption of such strategies;
- to explore in detail some of the more important strategies presently followed in both places using case studies;
- to ascertain different kinds of problems associated with the implementation of such development strategies, and;
- to identify measures that have been taken or are being taking to solve some of these problems.

Methodology

Saskatchewan and North Dakota share almost the same geographical characteristics in terms of location (Great Plains Region), vegetation, climate, relief/topography, natural resources, small population size, and socio-economic characteristics (a significant rural and agricultural population). The differences that exist between these two areas may be seen in terms of their administration systems, prevailing development or planning policies, and constituent populations. Four case study areas were selected from these geopolitical regions.

Both secondary and primary data were collected for the study. The latter involved oral interviews and questionnaire survey. One of the main reasons for adopting these methods of data collection is to minimize the discrepancies that might have occurred if one method of data collection had been pursued. The methods complement each other.

A comparative analysis of data (differences and similarities) from both study areas was attempted. The rationale underlying this comparative analysis approach is to understand or identify the similarities and differences of theory and philosophies of RCD strategies, and dominant causal forces (political, economic, socio-cultural, etc.) that have influenced these strategies and have shaped the communities under investigation. In the absence of any generally accepted criteria for measuring performance of RCD programmes, this study utilized contextual data obtained through the questionnaire survey, oral interviews, annual reports of the various departments on the performance of the various development programmes, and field observations for the comparative analysis on the performance of the selected RCD programmes and study areas. The comparative analysis of this study was conducted under three major sub-headings:

- (i) comparative analysis of the general background characteristics of the study areas,
- (ii) comparative analysis of the implementation of RCD programme in the study areas within the last thirty-five years starting from 1960, and
- (iii) comparative analysis of the performance of the various RCD programmes in the case study areas by considering the following factors:

achievement of the goals and objectives of the programme, programme life span, scale of operation, funding assistance, human resources and other technical assistance, political support, evidence of good leadership, evidence of local community participation, nature of programme and local resource base upon which rural development programmes are implemented. The level of performance of these factors was evident in the contextual data obtained from field investigation.

The second sub-heading is the main focus of this paper. The next section presents some of the major RCD programmes implemented in both study areas over the past thirty-five years.

Chronological Presentation of Major RCD Programmes in Saskatchewan and North Dakota

The introduction and implementation of development policies and programmes in both Saskatchewan and North Dakota actually started as far back as the Confederation era through the Great Depression to the 1960s when more purposeful attempts and efforts to undertake rural/community, regional and economic development programmes in Canada and the United States began. The 1960s were, therefore, chosen as the base year for the study. RCD planning activities in both study areas have been carried out under the federal and provincial/state levels. Itemized in Table 1 (a and b) are some of the major development programmes initiated by the federal governments in both Canada and the United States which have had an impact on the development of rural areas in Saskatchewan and North Dakota. Table 2 (a and b) contain some of the provincial/state government regional and RCD programmes.

Table 1: Some Federal Government regional and RCD programmes.

1(a): Saskatchewan

No.	Name of Programme	Time Period/Year Before 1960	Strategy Adopted Top-Down*
1	Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Adm. (PFRA)	1930s	Top-Down*
		1960-1977	Top-Down
2	Winter Works Program	1959/60	
3	Agric. Rehab. & Dev. Act (ARDA)	1961	
4	Area Development Agency (ADA)	1962	
5	Fund for Rural Econ. Dev. (FRED)	1966	
6	Dept. Regional Econ. Expansion (DREE)	1969	
7	General Dev. Agreements (GDAs)	1973	
		1978-95	Top-Down
8	Department of Regional Industrial Expansion (DRIE)	1981/82	
9	Ministry of State for Economic & Regional Development (MSERD)	1981/82	
10	Economic and Regional Development Agreement (ERDA)	1984	
11	Industrial and Regional Development Program (IRDP)		
12	Dept. of Western Diversification (WD)	1989/90	
14	Partnership Agreement on Rural Development (PARD)	1993	Top-Down
15	Partnership Agreement on Water-Based Economic Development (PAWBED)	1993	Top-Down & Bottom-Up* *

Compiled From: (i) Addo, E. (1992: 20-27); (ii) Dale, E. H. ed. (1988: 25-30); (iii) Gertler, M. *et.al.* (1992: 54); (vi) Hardy, N. in RDI (1990: 8-12); and (v) SED Annual Reports 1992-93; 1993-94.

***Top-Down Development Strategy or Development From Above:** This means development planning decisions are taken at the central or national level and filter through the political, administrative and economic hierarchy to local areas.

****Bottom-Up Development Strategy or Development From Below:** It is theoretically, the direct opposite of development from above. It contends that development planning, policies and decisions should be taken and implemented at the grassroots level by local people affected directly by the development decisions rather than at the central or national level.

1(b): North Dakota

No.	Name of Programme	Time Period/Year Before 1960	Strategy Adopted
			Top-Down
1	Commission on Country Life (CCL)	1910	
2	NEW DEAL under US Department of Agriculture (USDA)	1930s	
3	Farmers Home Administration (FmHA)	1947	
4	Rural Electrification Administration (REA)	1949	
5	Rural Telephone Loan (RTL)	1949	
6	Rural Free Delivery (RFD)	1949	
7	RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM (RD): Embodies 1,3,4,5&6	1955	
8	ND Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives (NDAREC)		
9	ND Association of Telephone Cooperatives (NDATC)		
10	Small Business Administration (SBA)	1953	
11	Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC)		
		1960-1977	Top-Down
12	RURAL AREA DEVELOPMENT (RAD): New name for RD	1961	
13	Area Redevelopment Act/Administration (ARA)	1961	
14	Accelerated Public Work Act (APWA)	1961	
15	Public Work and Economic Development Act (PWEDA)	1965	
16	Economic Development Administration (EDA): Replaced ARA	1965	
	- Economic Development Districts (EDDs)	Late 1960s	
17	Housing and Community Development Act (HCDA)	1974	
18	Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)	1974	
19	Office of Intergovernmental Assistance (OIA):In-charge of CDBG		
		1978-1995	Top-Down
29	National Rural Development Partnership (NRDP)	1990	
	(i) National Rural Development Council (NRDC)		
	(ii) State Rural Development Councils (SRDCs): North Dakota Rural Development Council (NDRDC) 1990-1991		

- 21 Rural Economic and Community Development Services (RECDs/RECD): Embodies RD, FmHA, other Federal Programs 1994
- (i) Rural Business-Cooperative Services (RBS)
 - (ii) Rural Housing Services (RHS)
 - (iii) Rural Utility Services (RUS)

Source: Compiled From Field Information, 1996

Table 2: *Some Provincial/State Government regional and RCD programmes.*

2(a): Saskatchewan

No.	Name of Programme	Time Period/Year	Strategy Adopted
		1960-1977	Bottom-Up
1	Community Capital Fund		
2	Community Recreation Director's Grant		
3	Community Recreation Support Grant		
4	Construction of water Supply Projects		
5	Industrial Towns Assistance		
6	Municipal on-the-job Training		
7	Regional Parks Program		
8	Rural Transportation Program		
9	Saskatchewan Development Program		
10	Neighborhood Improvement Program		
11	Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program		
12	Municipal Infrastructure Program		
13	Municipal Incentive Program		
14	Community Service Grant Program		
		1978-1995	Bottom-Up
15	Community Economic Development (CED)		
16	Infrastructure Development:		
a	(i) Enhancing the Physical Infrastructure		
	- Rural natural Gas Distribution Program		
	- Rural Industrialization		
	(ii) Water Development and Management		
	- Well Drilling Assistance Program		
	- Large Scale Irrigation Projects		

- Rafferty-Alameda Water Management Project
- b Educational Infrastructure for Rural Areas
 - Consolidation of Fragmented Schools-Coherent Network
 - Saskatchewan Communication Network
- c Information Infrastructure Development
 - Rural Service Centre (Computer Network)
- 17 Department of Rural Development (DRD)
 - a Community Economic Development Program (CED) 1982
 - b Rural Development Corporations (RDCs) 1986
 - (i) Agricultural Development & Diversification Boards (ADD) “
 - (ii) Rural Economic Development Grant “
- 18 Small Business Loan Association 1989
- 19 Partnership for Renewal (PR) 1989-90
- 20 Partnership for Growth (PG)
- 21 Saskatchewan Economic Development (SED)
 - a Decentralization Program
 - b Co-operative & Community Economic Development
 - Regional Economic Development Authorities (REDAs) 1993
- 22 Canada-Saskatchewan PARD Partnership -
- 23 Canada-Saskatchewan PAWBED Agreement

Compiled From: (i) Addo, E. (1992: 20-27); (ii) Dale, E.H. ed. (1988: 25-30) (iii) Gertler, M *et. al.* (1992:54); (iv) Hardy, N. in RDI (1990: 8-12); and (v) SED Annual Reports 1992-93; 1993-94.

2(b) North Dakota

No.	Name of Programme	Time Period/Year Before 1960	Strategy Adopted
1	Bank of North Dakota (BND)	1919	Bottom-Up
2	Economic Development Commision (EDC)	1957	
		1960-1977	Bottom-Up
3	Regional Development Councils (RDCs)	1969	
		1978-1995	Bottom-Up
4	North Dakota Spirit Program	1989	
5	North Dakota Vision 2000 Project:	1987-1990	
a	Rural Development Academy	1991	
b	Growing North Dakota Program	1991	
i	North Dakota Development Bank (NDDDB)	1991	
ii	Department of Economic Development & Finance (ED&F)	1991	
	(a) Funding Programs:		
	- Future Fund (FF)		

- Regional Rural Revolving Loan Fund (RRRLF)
- Technology Transfer Inc. (TTI)
- Mini and Incentive Grants
- (b) Agency Services Programs:
 - Community Economic Development (CED)
 - International Trade
 - Native American Business Assistance
 - Women's Business Development
 - Research

Source: Compiled From Field Information, 1996

Comparative Analysis of RCD Programmes in Study Areas

This section compares and contrasts the two study areas in terms of their development trends, strategies, goals, areas of focus, scale and underlying problems of policy and programme implementation.

Similarities

Prior to the 1970s, design and implementation of development policies and programmes in both Saskatchewan and North Dakota were carried out separately between federal and provincial/state governments, and between rural and urban communities. The current trend in operation is a convergence of development ideas and support from both levels of governments.

Interest in rural and economic development in both political regions was reactivated shortly after the recent recession period. The recent recovery processes exhibit similar characteristics in both regions. Assessments of prevailing rural and economic conditions were conducted by similar committees established by both provincial and state governments. These committees adopted a similar investigation approach whereby representatives from every sector of the economy, social groups, local communities (rural and urban), and private individuals were incorporated in the process. Based on the recommendations of these independent groups, broad long-term provincial/state development initiatives were established: the Partnership for Renewal/Growth in Saskatchewan and the Growing North Dakota programme in North Dakota. Likewise, the implementation of these programmes were placed under the

supervision of newly organized and restructured provincial/state departments, SED in Saskatchewan and ED&F in North Dakota. These departments also share similar programme/project implementation approaches. While they serve as facilitators in rural and economic development, and provide financial and technical support for various local development programmes and projects, they allow local communities to initiate their own development programmes/projects through voluntary leadership and self-help approaches on either an individual community or regional partnership/co-operative basis. This strategy, a combination of bottom-up and top-down approaches with particular emphasis on grassroots participation, is the most important development in rural planning in both areas.

The late 1980s and the 1990s have witnessed a gradual convergence of the top-down and bottom-up strategies in both study areas. The partnership agreement programmes such as WD and PARD in Saskatchewan, and NRDC and NDRDC in North Dakota are evidence of this claim. Recent observations reveal that while none of these approaches can exist in isolation, communities cannot develop on their own, and so the current convergence of both approaches requires that:

“[f]ederal and [provincial or] state governments set the legal and program contexts, regulate activities and possess the financial tools that must be accessed at other levels. Those who work at the community level need to network horizontally (to mobilize the community) and vertically (to engage in intergovernmental management) to make development successful” (Radin *et al.* 1996: 207).

While previous RCD policies and programmes in Saskatchewan and North Dakota focused attention on developing the traditional primary economic sector (particularly agriculture) and providing infrastructure, loans and grants assistance to local communities, current development policies and programmes place greater emphasis on job and wealth creation and strategies for community sustainability such as encouraging more value-added primary production activities; assisting business establishment, retention

and expansion; funding infrastructure rehabilitation and development projects; and developing the tourism industry. Recently, emphasis has been placed on the use of computer and telecommunication technologies in the development process.

The ultimate goals for Saskatchewan and North Dakota include diversification of the rural economy, reversal of rural out-migration trends, and helping local people take charge of their own destinies by incorporating self-help, self-reliance and sustainable development into local communities.

Differences

The two political regions however, differ somewhat in their approaches to development. While Saskatchewan witnessed a gradual shift from federal domination in RCD activities to more decentralized locally controlled development programmes in the early 1970s (e.g., the GDAs programme in 1973), North Dakota continued to implement top-down development programmes until the 1990s (although bottom-up strategies were also developed early in the study period, e.g., BND and the RDCs/SPRs). A recent investigation into the problems confronting rural North Dakota indicates that “federal dependence and lack of local control over economic conditions have resulted in a general feeling of frustration among a populace with a strong tradition of shaping their own destiny” (ED&F Handbook: 17). Ironically, most of the state’s public economic development policies and programmes, until the 1990s, have been geared toward development of public institutions: each of the major cities in North Dakota (Bismarck-Mandan, Fargo and Grand Forks) hosts state institutions such as state prisons, state hospitals and state universities. These institutions have received the bulk of the state government’s economic development funds.

Saskatchewan and North Dakota also differ in the nature and implementation of their bottom-up regional development programmes. Whereas North Dakota adopted the regional planning development approach in the first phase of the study period (i.e., in 1969), Saskatchewan did so in the second phase (i.e., in 1986 with the RDCs). The boundaries of the regional entities in North Dakota (State Planning Regions) are relatively permanent in nature, but

those in Saskatchewan (RDCs and the REDAs) are more flexible. The variations in the nature of these regional boundaries make comparison of size very difficult. The planning regions in North Dakota expand over the entire state but in Saskatchewan, they are yet to be extended to the northern section of the province.

The major rationale for pursuing the regional approach in both study areas is to eliminate unhealthy competition, duplication, and overlapping of development programmes and limited resources, but a critical look at the implementation of development programmes in North Dakota's regional entities reveals some deviation from these reasons. At the grassroots level, development programmes/projects in North Dakota are mostly initiated and implemented on an individual rural community basis within a region. In Saskatchewan, local programmes/projects are largely undertaken on a regional basis involving two or more communities.

Similarities and Differences of Achievements

The involvement of federal governments in the development of Saskatchewan and North Dakota has been relatively successful, particularly in the area of initiating development policies and programmes which in most cases have excluded the involvement of local community members, and providing financial and technical support for policy planning and implementation. Comparatively, the availability and accessibility of financial assistance for RCD has continued to be relatively higher in North Dakota than in Saskatchewan. Currently, rural communities, organizations and regional entities who are interested in rural and economic development in North Dakota can obtain development funding from the two major state funding departments, NDDB/BND and ED&F financial agencies and also from several federal departments in the state such as OIA (CDBG) and RECDS. Their counterparts in rural Saskatchewan are limited to provincial development funds from SED and other federal-provincial agreement programmes such as PARD.

It can be argued that a greater number of funding agencies does not necessarily translate into greater funding for successful rural and economic development. In spite of its relatively numerous

financial agencies, North Dakota has continued to experience higher rural out-migration than Saskatchewan. In both areas, the governments' technical support in the form of development personnel yielded limited results because these officials had little knowledge of prevailing local conditions.

In spite of the forgoing achievements, rural and economic development in Saskatchewan and North Dakota declined during the mid-1970s to mid-1980s recession. During this period, federal governments in both study areas dissolved some of the existing development programmes such as ARDA and DREE in Saskatchewan, and EDA in North Dakota. They also decreased financial and technical support for some other programmes such as PRFA in Saskatchewan, and CDBG and FmHA in North Dakota. Both study areas suffered from a bureaucratic centralization of development programmes and resources, and a lack of adequate funding for local development activities (Poole 1996; Radin *et al.*, 1996; Dale 1988; Gertler 1972).

The decentralization and federal-provincial partnership agreements approach for RCD have enhanced the development effort in Saskatchewan while North Dakota has just recently adopted this approach under the GND and NDRDC initiatives. Dale (1988) argues that while government assistance to rural communities in Saskatchewan is commendable, they are no more than stop-gap measures because they do not get to the core or root of the problems confronting these places.

Only recently have people argued that "new" RCD policies and programmes have to introduce more fresh ideas and generate positive results in local communities. Prior to the 1990s, while the names of policies and programmes changed, their underlying purpose, goals, objectives and development strategies remained the same. For example, in Saskatchewan, the federal DREE programme was changed to DRIE and later to ERDA, and the provincial SED took over from SEDT. In North Dakota, the federal FSA programme was renamed FHA and later, FmHA, while the state EDC programme also became ED&F.

Almost all federal and provincial/state RCD programmes were established and controlled from urban centres, significantly hindering the ability to recognize the nature of rural problems. For

example, the head offices of federal and provincial/state RCD programmes such as PFRA, PARD, and REDAs in Saskatchewan and RECDS, CDBG and BUILD in North Dakota are located in the urban centres of Regina and Bismarck respectively.

The problems and needs of rural communities are very dynamic in nature and, as a result, should be approached from a more dynamic perspective. The on-going Partnership for Renewal/Growth (Saskatchewan) initiative and the Growing North Dakota (North Dakota) programme exhibit such dynamism in tackling rural problems. The activities of these broad provincial/state programmes are not limited to selected communities or geared toward solving selected rural and urban problems but they attempt to deal with development problems in a more cohesive manner. Yet the programmes are hindered by a lack of personnel. As of July 1996, there were five rural and economic development officers involved in the implementation of the state-wide BUILD programme in North Dakota, while in Saskatchewan they numbered fifteen for the implementation of the REDA initiative. Nevertheless, if their implementation on a long-term basis is not jeopardized and if they receive the required support from all the parties involved in the development process, they may produce more positive results in the future.

This section indicated that while both areas share similar development trends, goals and strategies, they differ in many respects. The next section summarizes the major findings of the research.

Summary of Major Findings of Research

There were several major findings as a result of this research, including a gradual convergence of the top-down and bottom-up development strategies. Long-term implementation of provincial/state-wide rural and economic development policies and programmes has become the norm over short-term, selective-problem area development programmes. Preference is given to regional cooperation in rural and economic development rather than single community development, particularly in Saskatchewan. There has been a broadening of the RCD horizon beyond the

traditional farm gate to include economic development activities such as value-added production and job creation through small-scale business and industrial set-ups, tourism, and environmental sustainability. Finally, there is a trend towards protecting major socio-cultural life styles of rural communities.

Conclusion

This study demonstrated how federal, provincial/state, regional and local governments have played diverse roles in RCD in Saskatchewan and North Dakota. The dominant players in the past have been the respective federal governments who initiated and implemented several top-down development policies and programmes. Nevertheless, government approaches to rural/community, economic and regional development in the last few years have shifted from the rigid, hierarchical, top-down approach to a more flexible, decentralized, bottom-up grassroots approach. Future development programmes should aim at striking a balance between rural and urban communities rather than addressing the development issues of these communities in isolation. Development programmes should be geared towards strengthening and interweaving local institutions, infrastructure, economic, socio-cultural, religious and political components of the local system. While the similarities and differences of this study have not considered political changes and their impact on RCD, academics, particularly social scientists, are called upon to take up this challenge. Finally, academics should strive to develop a generally accepted method or procedure for conducting comparative social science research of rural areas.

References

- OFOSUHENE, M. 1997 *A Comparison of Rural Community Development Strategies in Saskatchewan and North Dakota* MA Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, University of Regina.
- ADDO, E. 1992 *A Geographical Analysis of the Rural Development Corporation Programme in Saskatchewan* MA Thesis presented to the Department of Geography, University of Regina.
- DALE, E. H. (ed) 1988 'The future of Saskatchewan small towns' *Western Geographers Series*, Vol. 24 Victoria, BC: University of Victoria.
- GERTLER, M., DAVIDSON, G AND STIRLING, B. 1992 'Experience and lessons of local initiative in agriculturally dependent communities: Ontario and Saskatchewan compared' Apedaile, L. P. and Rounds, R.C. (eds) *Stimulating Rural Economy for the 2000s* ARRG Working Papers Series November 2 Brandon, Manitoba: RDI Publication 54-56.
- HARDY, N. 1990 'Saskatchewan perspective, in Rural Development Institute (RDI)' *Proceedings of the Prairie Forum on Rural Development* Brandon, Manitoba: RDI Publication 8-12.
- NORTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND FINANCE (ED&F) nd. *Handbook, ED&F, Bismarck, North Dakota*.
- POOLE, K. E. 1996 'Federal regional development initiatives in Canada and the United States: Lessons from history' *The Regionalist* 1(4): 21-40.
- RADIN, B. A., AGRANOFF, R., BOWMAN, A. O., BUNTZ, C. G., OTT, J. S., ROMZEK, B. S. AND WILSON, R. H. 1996 *New Governance for Rural America: Creating Intergovernmental Partnership* Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas.
- SASKATCHEWAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (SED) *Annual Reports for 1992-93, 1993-94, 1994-95 and 1995-96* Regina, Saskatchewan.