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DDT IMPACT ASSESSMENT PROJECT, ZIMBABWE

A scientifically sound research project is insufficiently focused and undertaken too late to influence a key policy decision on insecticide use.

MAIN FINDINGS

- Inadequate involvement of key decision-makers despite good science
- Policy debate too far advanced to allow research findings to have any impact
- Poor presentation of results to policy-makers
- Project benefits not commensurate with costs
- Scientific findings still inconclusive

Background

DDT was widely and successfully used to control tsetse fly in Zimbabwe in the 1960s and 1970s. By the 1980s its use there had become controversial, partly because of the effects of its residues on non-target wildlife and partly because of its persistence in temperate climates where it was already banned.

The objective of the project was to produce a better understanding of the environmental costs of using DDT vis-à-vis alternative insecticides for ground spraying against tsetse, and to facilitate rational evaluation of the technique. The project was implemented between 1987 and 1992 at a cost of £866,000.

The Main Conclusions

The evaluators rated the project partially successful as far as it went. It was judged successful in terms of its immediate scientific objectives, but was found not to have achieved benefits commensurate with its costs. Despite excellent scientific research, the project is unlikely to have a significant impact on tsetse control policy and practice.

The project was identified by the Tsetse and Trypanosomiasis Control Branch (TTCB) in Zimbabwe as a follow-on to a study by the Natural Resources Institute. Although a good example of genuinely demand-led research, it focused too narrowly on the TTCB as the main end-user. Higher level policy-makers were insufficiently involved.

Only limited consideration was given to alternative insecticides.

The risks that the research might not succeed in influencing policy, or that in any event DDT might be phased out, were overlooked. Insufficient account was taken of the extensive literature available on DDT impacts in temperate zones and on how these had led to its disuse. As the project was restricted to monitoring, rather than experimenting with, insecticide use, the extent to which insect control could be redirected from DDT to alternative insecticides was limited. Only limited consideration

was given to alternative insecticides, potential human health impacts, wider environmental impacts, and constraints on the study's potential conclusiveness.

The project produced substantial new scientific knowledge on the extent and nature of DDT's environmental impacts in the tropics but the results were inconclusive in a number of areas. Significant uncertainties still remain over DDT's impact in the tropics, either on the target species or on the wider environment.

Dissemination of project results to the scientific community was good. But results were poorly presented and disseminated to policy-makers and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Even if the project's shortcomings had been recognised and addressed, it was set up too late to influence decisions on DDT use within Zimbabwe, and might never have been able to do so because of the public prejudice against DDT. The evaluators judge that this could reasonably have been foreseen.

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KEY LESSONS LEARNED

- Research into controversial subjects, or which runs counter to accepted policy and opinion, is especially risky and requires very critical appraisal
 - Research aimed at influencing policy requires careful appraisal of the existing policy context and trends, and of the linkages between research and policy
 - Research conclusions need to be clear and balanced if they are to influence policy, and adequate resources allowed for their presentation and dissemination
 - Research that is demand-led by one particular stakeholder still needs designing in collaboration with all other stakeholders, to ascertain the extent and nature of a wider demand and constituency for the research
 - Environmental impact studies are only conclusive if all major issues are adequately addressed, and adequate time allowed
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For further information see “DDT Impact Assessment Project, Zimbabwe” (Evaluation Report EV621), obtainable from Evaluation Department, Department for International Development, 94 Victoria Street, London SW1E 5JL, telephone 0171-917-0243. This report will also be accessible via the Internet in due course.

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