



# IASER DISCUSSION PAPER

Policy-making for rural development

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## Introduction\*

This paper stems from what might be called an exercise in the archeology of public policy. My initial concern was with a current field of governmental activity - the Rural Improvement Programme (RIP) - whose proclaimed aim was to link central financial resources with local initiative in order to improve the way of life of rural people (see Colebatch 1977 for a preliminary account of this study). The National Coalition Government has placed great stress on this programme (particularly in its early years in office) as a means of translating into action its concern for improving the lives of rural people (as opposed to what it saw as a narrow concern for economic growth). In presenting the 1973/74 budget, which more than doubled the allocation for RIP, the Minister for Finance described the increase as reflecting "major changes in policy." He went on

The change in name not only emphasises the much greater importance your Government attaches to rural improvement; it also symbolises a new approach. The emphasis is now not so narrowly on economic development, but more broadly on social improvement and an enrichment in the quality of the lives of village people.

... The increase in funds shows that we are prepared to do much more to help the under-privileged areas of Papua New Guinea.

(H.A.D.\*\* 28 August 1973, p. 2312)

In other words, the RIP was seen by the government as a major policy initiative, reflecting its determination to use the resources of government to achieve a particular sort of social change. It therefore offers an opportunity for a study of what happens when a government attempts this sort of change - i.e. of what "policy-making" means in the context of the working of the machinery of government. This paper is an attempt at such a study. It begins with a consideration of some analytical questions about policy; looks at the situation of the incoming government in 1972 and the way it made its commitment to the RIP; examines the development of policy in relation to the three main characteristics of the programme; and in its conclusions, tries to assess what can be learned from the RIP that is relevant to the more general study of policy.

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\* This paper is a contribution to a forthcoming book on Policy-making in Papua New Guinea 1972-77, now being edited by Dr John Ballard of the Australian National University.

\*\* House of Assembly Debates.

What is "policy"?

It is useful to start with the question of what "policy" means in relation to the activity of government. Classical liberal political science distinguished between policy and administration. This distinction was seen as being (at least ideally) parallel to a role-division between politicians and public servants: politicians made policy, and public servants carried it out. Policy was concerned with matters of principle, administration with matters of detail.

This model had its attractions, but it became increasingly difficult to relate it to the actual process of liberal cabinet government. It was clear, for instance, that formally-identified "policy decisions" did not spring fully-formed from the heads of the ministers with whom they were identified, and that public servants were significantly involved in their formulation. It was suggested then that ministers made policy by selecting from policy options presented to them by public servants, but this did not seem very satisfactory. It was not clear, for instance, that ministers always had options to choose from, or even that they wanted them. And in any case, the power to decide what the options were, and in what terms they were to be presented to the minister, was clearly of great importance. A further difficulty was that ministers did not always seem to want to concern themselves only with matters of principle and leave the detailed administration to their public servants: often, it was the details (rather than the principles) that ministers wanted to affect.

Another obstacle in the way of a clear-cut definition of policy was the way in which the term was used in government: it had great potential as a defensive weapon in the arsenal of the bureaucrat. Caiden, reporting to the Royal Commission on Australian Government Administration, made the point pungently:

The word 'policy' is used loosely to refer to what the Minister says, or what Cabinet decides, or what one has always been doing, or what one did yesterday, or what comes within guidelines, or whatever anyone wants it to mean. Both officials and politicians are prone to resort to oracular mystification by announcing that such and such a practice is 'policy.' ... Respect for policy is too often co-extensive with reverence for precedent and past practice. This awe for received guidance is related to the authority of Cabinet and the difficulty of securing change. (1975: 85)

The slipperiness of the concept has lead one academic writer on policy to adopt what might be called a definition of despair: "Public policy is all the courses of action carried out by the authorities" (Forward 1974: 1). This is a definition which has its appeal: it is certainly comprehensive, and it avoids some of the definitional red herrings that abound in discussions of policy - e.g. the classical distinction between "policy" and "administration", and the attempts to discuss something called "the problem of implementation", which is seen as being in some way distinct from the making of policy (on which see Schaffer 1976 n.5). But it does seem to throw the baby out with the bathwater: in escaping from formalist distinctions between policy and administration, it makes policy synonymous with governmental activity as such, which seems to deprive the term of most of its analytical value. To paraphrase Wildavsky, if policy is everything, maybe it's nothing.

Dearlove (1973: 2-6) is particularly helpful here. He recognizes that the term "public policy" relates to "the substance of what government does", but does not equate it with governmental activity as such. Rather, he sees it as the way in which governments commit resources in response to perceived problems; in that case, it is "the product or output of governmental activity." Defining policy by reference to commitments focuses our attention on its function in stabilizing the operation of the government machine. The outcomes of governmental activity are not entirely unpredictable: some matters are more or less settled, with participants' scope for action being limited by previous commitments; some matters, on which no such commitments have been made, are more open. To the extent that the course of government action is settled, we may speak of "policy", which can be seen as "a committed structure of important resources" (Schaffer 1977: 148). For this reason, "policy" can be (as Caiden complains) a shelter for the conservative and unadventurous bureaucrat. Equally, as is implied in the ministerial statement quoted on p.1, it can be a force for change in the nature and direction of governmental activity. The minister clearly expected that a change in the resources allocated to the programme would lead to a significant change in the impact it had on rural development.

This means, as Dearlove points out, that it is important to distinguish between "policy", in this sense, and "policy-making", particularly when this is taken to mean decision-making in relation to policy. Dearlove argues that in the London council which he studied, there certainly were policy decisions, in the sense of particular points at which significant commitments of resources were made. But equally important was the process of policy maintenance: the pattern of small, routine actions which stemmed from an initial policy commitment and reinforced it. The initial major commitment (e.g. to give a loan to a housing trust) can be followed by a succession of increasingly-routine decisions (e.g. to give subsequent loans to that trust). Dearlove argues that policy-maintenance is a very important and much-neglected aspect of the policy process.

A considerable amount of activity within organisations is, in fact, devoted to avoiding and resisting the necessity for taking trauma-producing decisions of this kind in favour of confining activity to the taking of decisions that are only routine and work within the framework of established policies maintaining the pattern of commitments and implementing the implications of earlier policy decisions. (1973:5)

Now while this is a very valuable insight, caution must be exercised in applying it to empirical situations. It is often the case that a substantial policy commitment leads to a series of relatively-routine decisions. But it is also often the case that a string of apparently-routine decisions can lead an organization into a quite different pattern of commitments - Lindblom's "disjointed incrementalism."

It is also possible that the initial commitment may not be followed and reinforced by a stream of routine decisions. For instance, in 1974 the Chief Minister issued a circular about the RIP in which he said, among other things, that the programme "should ideally result from a long term view or plan rather than be developed on an ad hoc basis." This implied a series of subsidiary decisions reinforcing this desire for planning (e.g. by giving some sort of preference to proposals which formed part of a plan). In fact, there were no such decisions, and it soon became clear that whether or not a project resulted from a plan made absolutely no difference to its chance of being funded, and no clients made any serious

attempt to draft (still less to adhere to) a long-term plan.\*

Here, it would seem ~~that~~ the impact of the "policy" decision was dependent on the existence of "routine" acts stemming from it. This suggests, perhaps, that the extent to which a decision should be regarded as substantive "policy-making" rather than routine "policy maintenance" is not so much something inherent in the decision itself as something derived from the extent to which the decision actually alters the flow of resources within the governmental machine. In other words, it may be more useful to think of policy-making decisions and policy-reinforcing ones as ideal types rather than as empirical categories, so that actual commitments within the policy process are examined in terms of the extent to which they reinforce existing patterns of commitment, or contribute to a movement away from them. And it is obviously important to look for non-decisions (as in the planning example quoted above) as well as decisions - the dogs that did not bark in the night, as it were.

#### Policy and the incoming government

When considering the specific case of policy-making in PNG under the National Coalition Government, the question is not simply "what did the incoming government want to do, and how did it do it?", but the rather broader question "what was the pattern of commitment which shaped the direction of governmental activity, and to what extent, and in what ways, did the actions of the new government change these commitments or reinforce them?" It should not be assumed, for instance, that the government was primarily concerned with changing the pattern of policy commitments: quite apart from the normal weight of inertia in the governmental process, the incoming actors had (or acquired) interests in the maintenance of existing commitments as well as a concern for the adoption of new ones.

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\* Not all those involved in the policy process agreed with the attempt to link RIP grants to the building-up of a planning process in the districts. Others argued that the RIP was meant to be a compensatory programme, filling the gaps in the overall pattern of government activity, and that it was therefore not possible to plan for RIP projects. I am not concerned here with the contradiction between these policy themes. I am simply pointing out that a directive issued to the public service at one point embraced the "pro-planning" view, but that in the absence of supportive decisions lower down the line, it had no impact.

They did have to make commitments of resources: the question is how purposive these were (in terms of either policy-innovation or policy maintenance), and how effective they were in terms of the purposes being pursued.

Before moving to the particular case of policy for rural development, it is worth noting three points about the policy situation applying to the incoming government in its early years.

The first is that the incoming figures (both ministers and new (national) departmental heads) were concerned with a great deal else apart from policy. They were for instance, concerned to work out their respective roles: the ministers were the first to be appointed in Papua New Guinea, and there was considerable uncertainty about their roles - among bureaucrats as well as among politicians, among the well-established actors in the policy process as well as among the newcomers. The Ministerial Member role of 1968-72 offered some cues about the role of a minister, but there had been much dissatisfaction with this role (particularly among Pangu MPs, then in opposition), and it was not one which the incoming government wanted to use as a model. As localization proceeded, there was a high turnover in the upper ranks of the bureaucracy, and consequently a need to learn the roles as they then existed (and by implication, to service the existing pattern of commitments rather than to introduce radical changes).

The second point is that the incoming government was a "Coalition of the Outs" - i.e. a loose alliance of all those who for some reason wanted to form a government without the United Party (which had up to that time had a numerical preponderance in parliament). This meant that it incorporated a range of political actors, with quite different styles and aspirations. It also meant that the policy objectives expressed in the early days tended to be couched in terms of broad polarities - Then and Now - rather than in terms of specific proposals for action. The old order (i.e. the colonial administration and its United Party supporters) stressed economic goals, the new government would stress social goals; similarly, large-scale development was to be replaced by small-scale development, centralization by decentralization, and "betting on the strong" by the equal distribution of benefits. These policy themes may have provided an ideological rallying-point for a disparate coalition, but they did not indicate specific courses of action for the government to follow.



Thirdly, the inexperience of the incoming actors meant that, to a large extent, they were unsure ~~as~~ just how they could affect the policy process. They were ambivalent in their attitudes towards the bureaucracy, which they saw as mainly responsible for the policy stance from which they had to some extent dissociated themselves. In many cases, they sought alternative advice from academics, outside consultants, and personal staff. But this did not always help them find their way around the government machine, for these outsiders were not necessarily more experienced in government than they were themselves. This could be of particular importance, as some sorts of question present themselves for policy attention - e.g. budgetary allocations - while others do not (e.g. the actual outcome of these allocations). Those who want to change the outcomes of government action have to find out the points at which existing commitments are subject to review before they can fight any battles over the worth of those commitments.

#### Existing "Rural Development" Commitments

Turning now to rural development as a field of policy commitments, one sees that the commitments are very extensive, and also highly bureaucratized. A number of government agencies were involved in seeking to influence the pattern of rural change - departments such as DDA and DASF, statutory authorities such as the Development Bank, and bodies outside the formal structure of government, such as cooperatives and local government councils - and they had increased considerably in both size and complexity in the 1950s and 1960s. McKillop (1977: 12-13) points out that in the Eastern Highlands, the number of staff involved in agricultural extension grew from one in 1953 to sixteen in 1963 and to one hundred and sixty-four in 1973 (plus thirty administrative staff). These structures of bureaucratic intervention had available to them a range of benefits, inducements and controls, and built up their client contact networks through which to distribute them (see, e.g. McKillop 1975).

In addition to the maintenance of its own bureaucracy, the government also provided funds under the Capital Works Programme for "rural development." These funds were first made available in 1967, and enabled district-level officials to secure funds for small, local projects. The initial allocation was \$200,000, of which half was earmarked for "rural development roads", \$25,000 for village water supplies, and the remainder for "aid to council

projects." By 1971/72 the allocation had grown to \$1.4m, but this was still a relatively small proportion of the whole Capital Works Programme (\$38.5m). (Ordinary departmental expenditure was \$96.2m. out of a budget total of \$208.1m.). Roads and bridges accounted for 90% of the funds spent, water supply projects 9% and all other projects only 1%. Recommendations for grants were made by the District Co-ordinating Committees, and each proposal was to provide for a local contribution, generally supposed to be 50% of the total cost.

The policy situation in 1972 was therefore marked by the presence of a new set of actors who wished to demonstrate the impact of the new government in general, and to manifest in particular its concern with rural development, but were uncertain about how this could be achieved through the existing machinery. The government had extensive commitments which at least purported to be concerned with rural development, but these largely sustained an existing bureaucracy, and it was a political commonplace that this bureaucracy was immersed in its own concerns, and was not sensitive to the needs of villagers or particularly effective at consciously changing their behaviour. (For empirical investigation of this, see McKillop 1975). It is in any case difficult for outsiders even to take in the nature and operations of large bureaucratic organizations, let alone work out how to control them and use them for their own innovative purposes. Grants programmes, by contrast, are attractive because they can be focused clearly on a particular target, brought into action quickly, and become a clear symbol of the policy intentions of the government. This, at any rate, is how the situation often appears to policy-makers. Of course, the organizational problems involved in, e.g. promoting very small public works projects, do not go away when a government chooses to pursue this aim by making grants to outside bodies to do the work: the problems are simply transferred to the outside body. It may or may not be able to cope with them better than a government department could do, but the advantage from the point of view of the government is that it cannot be held responsible for the problems and may only have the sketchiest knowledge of them.

It is not surprising, then, that the concern of the new government for promoting rural improvement came to focus on what was then called the Rural Development Fund. It was a clearly-labelled manifestation of governmental concern for the rural areas. Moreover, it was quantifiable:

changes in the commitment which it represented could be clearly identified and publicized. Increasing the allocation under this heading would not conflict directly with the interests involved in the other established commitments of the government. And the stress on local project initiatives appeared to circumvent the problem of getting innovative behaviour out of an established bureaucracy, and could at the same time be represented as a move towards the decentralization of decision-making, which was another declared policy aim of government.

#### The RIP as a Policy Commitment

The outcome of the expressed concern of the incoming government was, therefore, an increased stress on an existing programme of grants (the Rural Development Fund), including its renaming as the Rural Improvement Programme, and a substantial increase in the funds allocated to it (see table below).

Expenditure on the Rural Development Fund (1967/68 to 1972/73) and the Rural Improvement Programme (1973/4 to 1977)  
(\$/K)

	Budget appropriation	Actual expenditure
1967/68	200,000	141,118
1968/69	502,000	587,910
1969/70	1,000,000	1,007,400
1970/71	1,440,000	1,289,048
1971/72	1,450,000	1,446,558
1972/73	1,507,000	1,431,581
1973/74	3,300,000	3,636,928
1974/75	5,250,000	5,971,027
1975/76	6,000,000	6,185,700
1976/77	6,200,000	
1977 (½ year)	3,298,000	

Source: Rural Improvement Programmes; Budget papers; Conyers 1976: 18. In some cases there is disagreement between the sources on the correct figure.

The defining principles of the programme, as expressed in official statements, were (a) that proposals originated as local initiatives, filtered through local decision-making bodies, (b) that government grants were a matching contribution to local self-help efforts, and that projects were to promote improvements in the quality of life of rural people.

On the face of it, these were not new principles, but restatements of the formal rules of the Rural Development Fund. Even the "social improvement" theme (as opposed to economic development) emerged from a review of the Rural Development Fund made by officials in 1971, which had resulted in the preparation in March 1972 of a set of detailed proposals to give greater emphasis to "social" projects in the RDF. But what was really important was what these rules meant: what was the operational definition given to them in the course of the ordinary working of the programme?

The process whereby a pattern of specific commitments of resources is built on the foundation of these vague policy aspirations is clearly a fundamental part of policy formulation. But it does not neatly fit into Dearlove's distinction between policy decisions and routine decisions. For instance, the question of whether or not a project can be counted as improving the quality of rural life is clearly not a routine or trivial one, either to the client or to the programme itself (although it may seem so to an administrator confronted with a great many such "micro-decisions"). Nor is it adequately described as the "implementation" of already-formed "policy": clearly, it would be fatuous to say that the policy was to promote improvements in the quality of rural life, and that the question of what this meant was simply a matter of implementation. What the policy is can only be expressed in terms of the sort of commitments that can be successfully attached to this particular ideological flag. This paper will therefore be concerned in some detail with the way in which these policy themes were defined and refined in the course of the programme's operation.

This process of definition consisted not so much of formal decisions about the nature of the programme, but more of a series of small decisions (sometimes implicit rather than explicit) and non-decisions about what projects would be funded under the programme. There were, at least in theory,

a number of filters through which proposals had to pass. They were proposed by councils or local groups, scrutinized by the District Coordinating Committee, assembled into district lists by (from 1974) Area Authorities or conferences of councils, forwarded to the coordinator of Works in Waigani, and, eventually, included in a list presented to cabinet by the Minister for Finance for its approval. At any stage in this process, proposals were open to challenge; in practice, however, especially in the earlier years of the programme, there was usually little objection to the inclusion of projects on council lists, or even to the inclusion of all council projects on district lists.

The critical point in the filtering process was the consideration of district lists by the Coordinator of Works and the Minister. The programme had only one minister for the whole of this period, and he maintained a close interest in it, giving the Coordinator general directives on the sort of projects which he would like to see included in the programme and those which should be excluded. The Coordinator's office would then draw up lists within these guidelines, and the Minister would make the final ruling on any marginal cases. The programme then had to be submitted to the National Executive Council, but it appears that it was unusual for the programme to be subjected to further detailed consideration at this level.

To some extent this process can be described in Dearlove's terms - the Minister laying down the guidelines ("policy decision") and the officials making a number of smaller decisions within these guidelines ("routine, reinforcing decision"). But there were important differences. One was that the guidelines were not consistently applied. The guidelines were said to exclude the purchase of vehicles from RIP funds, and in 1976/77 the Gumine Council was refused funds to buy a four-wheel drive vehicle for the maternal and child health clinic; the Central New Ireland Council, however, received a grant to buy a truck for the Lemeris school. Similarly, the guidelines were said to preclude the use of RIP funds for departmental purposes, and in the same year the New Ireland Area Authority was refused funds for a rat control programme on the grounds that this was already a Department of Primary Industry project. But in East New Britain, the Department of Business Development received an RIP grant for "Village Industries Training and Development" which would appear to be a departmental function.

The binding effect of the policy guidelines was also eroded by the use of fairly open subterfuges. For instance, the maximum grant per project in 1974/75 was \$10,000. In that year, the first five projects on the West Sepik programme were:

10-1	Lumi-Aitape road (Gravelling Stage 2)	(Grant \$10,000)
10-2	Lumi-Aitape road (Mokai Construction)	(Grant \$10,000)
10-3	Lumi-Aitape road (Gravelling Stage 3)	(Grant \$10,000)
10-4	Lumi-Aitape road (Gravelling Stage 4)	(Grant \$10,000)
10-5	Lumi-Aitape road (Sibi River bridge)	(Grant \$5,000)

All of these projects were funded. Another such subterfuge was the funding of a church on the grounds that in remote and sparsely settled areas, the church functioned as a community centre. (The church in question was in fact in the provincial headquarters.)

What this all means is that the laying down of "policy" guidelines did not in fact diminish the importance of individual admission decisions. It is important to note here that the bodies doing the bidding (Area Authorities and council conferences) were not being given clear cues about the sort of projects that would or would not be admitted: no formal criteria were promulgated, and the de facto rules appeared to vary from year to year and even within a single year. As only a very small proportion of proposals was rejected (in 1975/76, only 20 proposals were rejected of the 1,140 submitted), local bodies had every reason to try their luck with any given proposal and see if it would be accepted.

In this context, it is significant that responsibility for the programme lay with the Department of Finance, rather than with any of the agencies more directly concerned with rural development. Finance had no field staff of its own (or none who were used in connection with the RIP) and therefore had to deal directly with district- and local-level bodies who were clients rather than agents, without the benefit of any independent source of information or administrative support in the field. There were several attempts by the Office of Local Government to take over responsibility for the programme, on the grounds that it was essentially a grants programme for local councils and that the OLG was much more closely attuned to what was actually going on in the operation of the programme, but these were vigorously and successfully resisted by Finance.

The programme was administered by a section of the department which was primarily concerned with the channelling of money to the district engineers of the Public Works Department under the Capital Works Programme; in terms of administrative procedure, then, the RIP was seen as a works programme executed by bodies other than PWD.

### "Local Initiatives"

To speak of "local initiatives" immediately raises the question, "what is local?". Does it mean simply those people living in some geographically-defined area, or does it imply those people who could be regarded as forming a local "community"? "Local" groups who might conceivably put forward project proposals under the RIP could include -

- (a) customary groups based on kinship; (purportedly?)
- (b) locally-based officials of the agencies of government (who are quite likely to be foreign to the area, or even to the country),
- (c) "contact structures" under official sponsorship, such as local government councils;
- (d) "non-sponsored" groups, such as anti-council movements, student-initiated development associations, etc.

The RDF had operated through an institutional framework consisting of locally-based officials working through official contact structures. Proposals went to the national level from the (official) District Co-ordinating Committee, and the effective channel to the DDC was through kiaps in the field (although councils might be listed as the formal sponsor).

The RIP continued to operate as the RDF had, through councils and kiaps, though increasing weight was given to elected representation at the district level, where the (indirectly elected) Area Authority (or, in its absence, the combined Councils Conference) took over from the DCC responsibility for formulating district priorities and submitting requests to Port Moresby. The increasing identification of the RIP with councils reduced the possibility of smaller community groups (type (a) or (d) in the formulation used above) successfully tapping the RIP. Few such groups are listed in the annual programmes as project sponsors (see Colebatch 1977: 9), and while some may be subsumed under the general umbrella of the relevant committee, there is no evidence to suggest that

this is at all common. Indeed, the fact that many groups of this nature are either explicitly or implicitly anti-Council makes it unlikely that the councils are putting their projects forward for RIP grants. In November 1977, one regional MP told some dissident constituents from an anti-council part of his electorate that RIP grants could only be given to legally-constituted councils, and that this explained why that particular area had done relatively poorly in the annual allocation.\*

Several points should be noted here. The first is that the procedures of the programme reinforced the tendency for allocations to be limited to councils. Projects had to be proposed on a form, with costings and justifications, and had to be formally submitted by a particular date each year, for funding approximately 9-12 months later. These procedures had been devised and administered by kiaps, and the organizations best able to comply with them were the councils, who in most cases had kiap advisers (who were, in an indeterminate but large proportion of the cases, the people responsible for the actual drafting of the council RIP proposals). Without going into the question of the extent to which non-council groups would be capable of executing the sort of projects actually funded by the RIP, it is evident that even in only procedural terms they would be starting from well behind scratch.

A second point to be noted is that as the relationship between councils and kiaps changed, adherence to the norms of "efficiency" held by kiaps and the Finance Department became more difficult to enforce. ("Efficiency" in this context, can be taken to mean spending money only on the projects for which it is allocated, and completing such projects as quickly and economically as possible; it does not take in considerations of the purpose of the project or of the programme as a whole). Councillors increased their political confidence, and at the same time there was a decline in both the confidence and the competence of the kiaps. Consequently, there was more pressure (or more effective pressure) for councils to assume real control over the funds allocated to them. This usually meant less "efficient" use of funds in the sense outlined above: a higher proportion of grants spent on labour (an important point, to which we will return later), more uncompleted projects, and more waste of materials and effort.

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\* Post-Courier, 24 November 1977. The MP was Mr Noel Levi (New Ireland Regional) addressing his remarks to an organization of young educated people from Lavongai.



One official response to this trend was to try to improve the efficiency of the administrative machinery of the RIP. Kiaps were seconded to Area Authorities full-time to work as "RIP Managers"; technical staff were made available to Area Authorities by Public Works to supervise projects; outstanding uncompleted projects were consolidated; there was a manifest desire for fewer and bigger projects so that they could be effectively supervised; etc. This approach culminated in a proposal (which was current in the early stages of thinking about provincial government) that something like the top two-thirds of the RIP should be absorbed into a "Provincial Works Programme" to be run by PWD for the provincial government, while the small local projects would remain with something like the present RIP (which would presumably operate in much the same way as it does at present). The proposal has not been carried very far in policy circles, largely because it became clear that provincial governments would swallow the RIP whole, and that for this reason there was little point in debating what form it might take after the event. It is significant, though, as evidence of a common sentiment among officials concerned with the RIP - i.e. that the trouble with the programme lay in its being handled by local bodies of low competence, and that one solution would be to put it into the more "professional" hands of PWD.

In a situation where money was being made available through local channels for ill-defined purposes, one might expect that field officials of the various departments (other than DDA) might try to place departmental projects on the RIP. Certainly, this has happened to some extent, but perhaps to a lesser extent than comparable experience in other countries might suggest (see, e.g., Collins 1976). The Department of Education realized the potential of the RIP at a relatively early stage, and managed to get large numbers of primary school classrooms and teachers' houses (formerly a responsibility shared in an uncertain fashion between councils, the Education Department and the local community) placed on the RIP. The department subsequently managed to transfer much of the financial burden of the construction of new high schools onto the RIP as well. Other departments, however, seem to have been less active in tapping the RIP as a source of funds.

One consequence of the effective redefinition of "local initiatives" to mean "council initiatives" has been that RIP projects are increasingly identified as council projects (rather than "community" projects).

Villagers who perceive RIP projects in this way are unlikely to feel any personal commitment to them, and will be reluctant to contribute to them (other than through their council tax); consequently, local labour will be paid labour, and local materials will have to be paid for. There is considerable evidence that this is already the case over a large area of the country.

As well as asking "what is local?", we must also ask "what is an initiative?". The formal model of the programme implies that the action of the central government is in response to activities which have already begun on the ground. But the fact that a total budgetary allocation is made for the programme is in itself an inducement to spend, since both ministers and public servants need to justify the allocation for which they have struggled by showing that it can all be spent. In the early years of the RIP (1973-75), when allocations were rising rapidly and were outstripping demands, district officials were specifically instructed to ignore the normal rules limiting spending and to spend at the maximum possible rate. (This was not simply a case of following the ground rules of the budgetary process: the amount of unspent RIP funds remaining with councils had been raised by the Australian side at aid negotiations in Canberra). Breaking down the national allocation into provincial figures gives the provinces a specific inducement to spend up to that figure. The fact that there is a specific figure to be spent, and that it comes up for grabs at a particular point in time, has meant that, to a large extent, local "initiatives" have arisen in response to the existence of the programme, rather than vice versa, and the "initiatives" are limited to the formal requirements of the programme - i.e. a declaration of intent coupled with a request for financial support. In many cases, council lists of RIP projects have been compiled by the kiap adviser in order to meet the deadline, with the council giving its formal assent.

We can see, therefore, two trends at work: one is the routinization of RIP projects, the close involvement of government officials in them, and their consequent identification as governmental projects. The other is a tendency to increase in scale. Both of these trends make it increasingly difficult to discuss the RIP in terms of the language of "local initiative" which is found in some of the official pronouncements about it.

"Local Self-Help Efforts"

The idea of local self-help activity is an important component of central rhetoric about the RIP. In introducing the 1976/77 programme, the Minister for Finance stated:

The programme should not be thought of as a list of hand-outs. Rather, it should be seen as embodying the determination of the Government to back-up the efforts of the people themselves.\*

"Self-help" has been discussed in relation to the RIP largely in terms of the amount or proportion of "local contribution" to the project. In other words, although the rhetoric speaks of a central government contribution to an on-going local activity, the discussion of detail assumes that it is the local community which is making the contribution, and the government which is actually executing the project. The RDF had had a requirement for 50% of the cost of a project to be met by the local contribution, but even by 1969 this was described as "not automatic."\*\*

For the RIP, there was the question of what constituted a local contribution. Cash contributions were relatively straightforward: in most cases, they became routinized as votes from the council budget. Since the councils were the construction authorities for most RIP projects, the only real evidence of the "local contribution" was the fact that the council had spent more on the project than the grant it had received. (Conversely, if this were not the case, then clearly there had been no local contribution). But in addition to cash, local groups could make their contribution in kind - materials or labour. This was recognized as being particularly important, since a reliance on cash contributions as criteria for a grant has a regressive impact ("To him that hath, more shall be given ..."). The supply of materials for projects was also straightforward, and in any case declined in importance as projects became more "formal" in nature and there was less call for bush materials.

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\* Foreward; The Rural Improvement Programme for 1976/77 (Port Moresby, Government Printer, 1976) p.3.

\*\* Administrator's Circular Memorandum of 28 May 1969, "Rural Development."

The idea of local contributions in the form of labour raised more problems. Papua New Guineans had long been required to contribute free labour (usually one day a week) for road maintenance and other public purposes, and the assumption with the RIP was that people would be willing to contribute their labour for local projects, and that this could then be costed and counted as part of the local contribution. This assumption rested on two other assumptions: first, that villagers would identify with the goals of the project and get intrinsic satisfaction from their participation; secondly, that there would be no alternative uses for their labour time. In fact, as has been noted, there was a tendency for projects to be seen as government ones (not an unreasonable perception given the clear interest of government officials in getting such projects completed), and from the start, a very clear reluctance to provide free labour. There were, in fact, alternative uses for the apparently-untapped labour time of villagers (not necessarily wage labour). And one consequence of the pattern of political change was an increasingly strong demand from villagers that the governmental machine provide them with some positive benefit in exchange for their loyalty and their taxes. In this atmosphere it became difficult enough for councils even to maintain their tax collections, let alone ask for new contributions of free labour.

The solution devised by the officials who handled the RIP was that it would be possible to pay people for work on RIP projects, but less than the rural minimum wage, the difference being counted as their contribution to the project. For instance, if a project required 1000 man/days of labour, the calculation would go like this:

1000 man/days at K2-00 per day (the rural minimum wage)	K2000
1000 man/days at K0-50 per day (amount actually paid)	K 500
Amount saved	K1500

This amount of K1500 is then counted as the local contribution to the project.

Leaving aside the question of whether or not it is realistic to consider this notional K1-50 per day as income foregone and therefore as a contribution to the project (on which see Colebatch 1977: 21), it is clear that the decision to pay a wage of some kind represents a dramatic transformation of the significance of the RIP for the villager. Where labour is contributed freely, the potential value of the RIP to the villager is the completed project: the road, the classroom, the aid post. Where a wage is offered, a very important benefit is the employment which the project offers. In most rural areas, there is little wage employment available, the employment benefit offered by the RIP may outweigh the benefits offered by the completed project. In these terms, a road project, which offers jobs for large numbers of labourers, may be valued more than an aid post constructed by council carpenters with little additional labour. Furthermore, it is not necessary for the road to be completed to yield its value: in fact, an uncompleted road project represents not a failure (as outside observers might see it), but a successful source of employment this year, and a possible source of further employment next year.\*

The next question, after determining what could be regarded as the local contribution, was to determine what level of contribution should be required. From the administrative point of view, the simplest answer would be to require all councils to contribute a fixed proportion of the total project cost. But because council areas vary widely in terms of their wealth, the concentration of their population and the cost of providing services, it could be argued that it would be inequitable to require all councils to meet the same proportion of project costs, and that councils in richer, more central areas should pay proportionately more than councils in remoter, poorer areas. A variable rate of contribution would enable more equitable dealings as between councils in terms of capacity to pay, but

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\* Those who consider this a cynical formulation should ask why so high a proportion of roads built under RIP are not trafficable. One kiap in the Gulf stated that on one occasion, a group of villager working on an RIP road presented a wage demand of such proportions that it would not have been possible to complete the road. He pointed this out to the group (who did not dispute it) and asked "What do you want: the money or the road?" The unequivocal answer was "The money."

would equally enable variations on many other grounds, and would also raise the question of who was to decide what rate of contribution was appropriate in any particular case. The outcome was that no firm rule was prescribed, and it was left to project sponsors to propose the level of local contribution which they felt appropriate, and to Area Authorities and the Co-ordinator of Works to challenge the proposal if they felt so inclined. I have no detailed information the way in which the control system worked in the earlier years, but the level of local contribution appears to have declined. By 1976/77, the claimed level of local contribution ranged from 49.1% (Western Highlands) to 12.8% (Gulf). In this year, it was announced that some provinces had had their allocations reduced because of low rates of local contribution; the following year, it was stated that some projects had been deleted for the same reason. It was not made clear, though, what rate of local contribution was regarded as unacceptable, or what screening procedures would apply in the future.

Finally, there was the question of how anyone in the central government would ever know what the rate of local contribution really was. Certainly, there were figures stated on the application form, but there was no procedure for determining if these targets were in fact met. The cash contribution was, in effect, paid by the council to the council, and only an investigation of the audit reports would show if there had been any real transfer. The contribution in kind was described by one kiap as "almost without exception the figment of someone's imagination [which] bears absolutely no relation to the amount of subsidised labour that can be expected to be applied to a project." There were wide variations in the level of contributions in kind claimed which are not necessarily explicable by objective differences between the provinces in question, and are just as likely to reflect instead variations in the practices of kiaps. It was technically possible for the Department of Finance to determine (after the event) what the actual level of local contribution had been, by consulting the council audit reports held by the Commissioner for Local Government, and this seems to have been done in particular cases (though not necessarily by Finance). But the small staff in the Coordinator's office would not have been able to do this for all RIP projects. While a pooling of staff by the Coordinator and the Commissioner for Local Government might have circumvented this problem, it appears that the two offices were not accustomed to working together this closely.

It can be seen, then, that although self-help contributions occupied an important place in the rhetoric of the RIP, there was not a great deal of detailed concern at the central government level about this aspect of the programme, so that decisions about definition were left to officials further down the line. They had to decide what level of local contribution they could hope to achieve, and how this could best be presented in the application forms (which was the only information about local contribution available at the time to those making the allocations). In the course of this micro-decision-making by officials, the significance of the RIP from the villager's viewpoint was completely transformed by the general acceptance of the practice of paying wages for RIP work. That so fundamental a change could happen in this way illustrates the importance of middle-level actors in the process of policy formulation.

#### To Achieve Improvements in the Quality of Rural Life

Formal pronouncements on the RIP declare this to be its aim. As has already been noted, policy statements in the early years of the new government stressed that the programme should not concentrate on roads and bridges, as it had done in the past, but should focus more on "the quality of the lives of village people." As the same pronouncements also stressed that the RIP was an example of decentralized decision-making, the possibility immediately arises of a conflict between these two values (decentralization and the stress on "social" projects). What would happen if the preferences of decision-makers in Port Moresby and the provinces did not coincide? As it happened, in most cases the officials and clients at the provincial level and below did not share the concern of people in Port Moresby to shift the emphasis away from roads and bridges. They saw road projects as being tangible, known, within the technical capacity of sponsors, and representing a source of employment for large numbers of people with little other income.

This implicit conflict was a continuing one: the Department of Finance continued to stress the importance of "social" projects, but did not actually veto the project proposals which it did receive. (Projects were deleted from provincial submissions for a variety of reasons, but it does not appear that this was done systematically in order to increase the proportion of social projects). At the same time, officials in the

field made efforts to drum up projects of the sort desired by Finance, and to present projects as having a "social" dimension wherever possible. Fairly soon, the Education Department became aware of the situation and realized that it offered the possibility of securing funds for the replacement of bush material classrooms and teachers' houses, and thereby free headmasters of the need to badger the local community incessantly to renew and replace these buildings. Some misgivings were expressed in Finance about the incorporation of classrooms and teachers' houses into a programme for rural improvement, but provinces included them in their submissions in considerable numbers, and then were funded.

To some, this inclusion of primary school construction projects represented an increase in the "social benefits" side of the RIP ledger. But it can just as well be viewed as representing a consolidation of the tendency for the RIP to become an alternative works programme, whose function was to accommodate projects which for one reason or another could not be included in either of the government's other programmes (Capital Works and Minor New Works). And it is open to question how much projects of this sort can be regarded as contributing to the "enrichment in the quality of the lives of village people" to which the minister referred.

The point, however, is not whether or not an outside observer, looking back at the programme, would regard any given project as having improved the quality of rural life, but to what extent the programme was geared up to ask this question. For instance, to take one example, I do not know whether the purchase of a bus for the Namatanai Day High School\* enriched the quality of the lives of the village people; what seems to me more important is that this question would have been dealt with only in an incidental way during the processing of the application. The applicant did not have to show that the project would have any village impact, the official receiving the application would have had very little information on the subject, fairly vague guidelines to work on, and a general disposition to make a grant unless there was some good reason not to do so.

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\* Project 15-64 of the 1975/76 RIP. It attracted a grant of K9000 with with a local contribution of K9000 in kind. It was unfortunately not spelt out what sort of contribution in kind can be used to buy a bus.



There would have been, moreover, no evaluation after the event of the impact of this project on the quality of life in the area served. The Department of Finance did try, from time to time, to obtain from local councils or kiaps Certificates of Completion in respect of RIP projects (as were required under the Capital Works Programme), but with little success. Its exhortations were generally ignored by field officials, and it refrained from applying any sanctions (e.g. delaying or suspending funds) to bring about compliance. Given that it was unable to ascertain even if the projects which it financed had been constructed, it is hardly surprising that it would have been unable to assess the impact which they had on the quality of life.

In short, the proclaimed aim of the programme proved to be a difficult thing to give a clear operational meaning to within the particular organizational structure through which the RIP was run. The rather worn categories in which projects were placed in official discussions of the RIP did little to illuminate the actual impact of the programme and the real benefits which it represented to village people. Roads were classed as "economic" projects - a hangover from the days of the World Bank Report and OPAC and internal rates of return - even though it was clear that many of the roads were untrafficable either on completion or shortly thereafter, and that the real benefit was the employment offered by their construction. Conversely, schools were seen as "social" projects, in the face of all the evidence that parents regard education as an investment aimed at securing salaried jobs for their children. Neither the top officials allocating the funds, nor the middle-level officials distributing them, made any systematic evaluations of the impact of the programme. Indeed, it can be argued that it was not in their interest to develop a concern with the impact of projects, since they all had a personal interest in maintaining the flow of money through the programme, and any study which questioned the ultimate utility of the whole exercise posed a potential hazard.

### Conclusions

It remains to ask what light this account throws on the policy process under the National Coalition Government. It may help to begin by outlining a formal model of policy-making, and then considering the extent to which the process which we have been discussing can be described in these terms.

In the formal model, the election of new government is of great significance in policy terms because it brings in new policy-makers at the top of the government machine. Attention is focused on the policy concerns of the incoming actors in the political process, the decisions they make about the future course of government action, and the way in which, and the extent to which, these decisions are implemented.

In practice, as we have seen, the arrival of the new government does not necessarily have the dramatic impact on the policy pattern that the model implies. New governments do bring new (or at least different) sets of policy concerns with them, but they also inherit an existing pattern of policy commitments, and strong structural inducements to maintain these commitments rather than to abandon them in favour of new proposals. In this particular case, there was an extensive set of existing commitments supporting various forms of government intervention in rural areas (i.e. policy for rural development), and while the incoming government felt some dissatisfaction with the way the governmental machinery operated in rural areas, it did not pursue this to the point of seeking radical changes to the way the existing machinery worked. Rather, it sought to compensate for this by building up an alternative form of governmental activity at the side, as it were - the RIP. And in doing this, it was not adding something completely new to the machinery of government, but building up a programme that was already there.

Moreover (and more importantly) it appeared that the role of government in the policy process could not really be described as taking big, important decisions, with minor questions of administrative detail being left to officials. The "decision" (ministerial) that projects should have a self-help component was less significant than the "decision" (official) that people could be paid a wage and still be counted as having made a self-help contribution.

Furthermore, it did not necessarily make sense to talk about "decisions" in this context. As the use of quotation marks in the previous paragraph implies, it is not clear that there were in fact specific, identifiable decisions in either of these matters. The ministers inherited a Rural Development Fund which provided for a self-help contribution, and the assumption that this would continue to be required was implicit rather than explicit. Similarly, the practice of paying villagers for work on RIP

projects would have stemmed from a series of "micro-decisions" in particular cases by individual field officials, reinforced by "non-decisions" by officials and others further up the line (i.e. implied decisions not to intervene). The concept of a policy decision implies a major, binding commitment in principle, which brings in its train a number of consequential, administratively-determined decisions which implement the major decision: in practice, key choices about the RIP were made in a very specific and local context by actors at the local level. The concept of a decision has more to do with the analytical constructs of the observer, such as the presumption of rationality and purpose, than with the actual processes of the RIP. As Schaffer puts it:

Drama is continuous. Decisions are convenient label given post hoc to the mythical precedents of the apparent outcomes of uncertain conflicts. (1975: 6)

As was noted in the "planning" example cited earlier, a policy pronouncement from the Chief Minister could be quite ineffective in the absence of specific changes in the day-to-day handling of project applications. What counts is not so much who made the decision but whether or not it "sticks." If it does, one could talk about a decision, but it would be more precise to speak of a commitment.

The role of officials, then, is not one of implementing formed policy, but of making, maintaining and changing commitments of important resources within a framework of ideological parameters and some specific reference points determined (implicitly or explicitly) by ministers. In the RIP, the ministers' role was, broadly, to manifest their concern for rural people by allocating a new name, higher prestige and much more money to an existing programme of grants which declared itself to be promoting rural development. These were the tools which came most readily to hand: other ways of achieving a more direct impact of government on rural change were possible, but would have required other resources - better channels of information, for instance - which were perhaps not as readily available. In any case, this financial commitment was made, and to it were attached ideological statements of the government's intent.

Within this broad framework, officials directed resources to particular projects. The most significant group at the centre was the office of the Co-ordinator of Works, which controlled the actual allocation of funds. It was essentially a central office, with no field staff of its own, and was therefore dependent on proposals and reports sent in by clients for its information on the progress of the programme. (It tried to ensure that these reports were submitted by delaying the payment of fund allocations). It resisted any suggestions that control of the programme should be transferred to the Office of Local Government, which would have been better placed to advise councils and exercise restraints on the use of funds. This is perhaps partly explained by, or partly rationalized by, the technocratic argument encountered in Finance that the department has no concern with the way in which, or the effectiveness with which, funds are spent, but only with seeing that funds are spent on the purpose for which they are voted.

This meant that field officials dealing with the programme, who were largely DDA staff of one sort or another, were to some extent cut off from Headquarters officials dealing with the programme, since they were from another department and were not formally regarded as agents of the Co-ordinator of Works. They were also, in many cases, in an ambivalent positions vis-à-vis the RIP, since they were, in effect, clients of the programme themselves, or at least brokers. It was at this level that most of the critical interpretative choices had to be made: did this sort of activity qualify for the programme? Did the limited amount of local contribution proposed satisfy the programme requirements? On occasions, the Co-ordinator of Works' office would intervene in these matters, but in general they were left to field staff.

What this meant was that the RIP could mean quite different things in different parts of the country: it was very much dependent on the relationship between the kiap and his constituents, and this was of course very variable. In some areas, such as parts of the Southern Highlands, a kiap (particularly an expatriate kiap) who enjoyed the confidence of his council could effectively control the RIP in his area. In other areas, such as the Gulf, kiaps had to stand helplessly by as councils voted away their RIP grants in the form of roadwork contracts, at rates which seemed to the kiaps ludicrously excessive.\*

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\* I asked one council kiap in the Southern Highlands what he would do if his council attempted this. He replied "I just wouldn't let them do it."

What was common to the programme in all areas was money: essentially, the RIP was a spending programme. Public discussion of the programme was nearly always about the allocation of grants between different areas, or (more rarely) about inefficiency and waste in the spending patterns of particular councils. The volume of spending becomes an end in itself in official pronouncements:

Since the National Coalition Government came to power a total of K21.5 million has been allocated compared with K4.506 million in the previous five years. This shows quite clearly the Government's intentions in the field of Rural Development.\*

Whatever the purpose of the programme may be held to be, one of its most important functions has become that of the pork barrel - the fund of government largesse available for distribution to demonstrate the goodwill of the regime.

We can see then that the policy question in relation to the RIP is not simply "What were the government's intentions, and were they fulfilled?" The government's intentions were not necessarily clear, or constant, or mutually consistent. And they were certainly not the only significant factors in the policy process: such things as the diffusion of bureaucratic responsibility for the programme, the emphasis on formal budgetary procedures, and the pressure to maintain spending rates for demonstration purposes, were all as significant as any formal statement of government intentions in shaping policy (i.e. establishing commitments) relating to the RIP. Obviously, one could take formal statements of the aims of the programme - raising the rural standard of living, promoting self-reliance, etc. - and try to assess to what extent these things had or had not happened, leaving one with a balance sheet - almost certainly in the red - and a conclusion about the effectiveness of the RIP. But to do this would be to take a simplistic view of the powers of government and the nature of governmental commitments. In effect, in setting up the RIP the government was creating an opportunity, giving scope for rather freer access to public funds (for some sorts of claimant) than was normally allowed. Once this opportunity, this arena for action, had been created, the hopes and preferences of the government became one of the several alternative perspectives on appropriate modes of government action. Several observers have spoken of the alleged inefficiency, confusion

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\* Foreward, Rural Improvement Programme for 1976-77 (Port Moresby, Government Printer, 1976) p.3.

and waste associated with the RIP, but have not taken the point that the possibility of this outcome is inherent in anything like the RIP. The real policy question is "what happens to the pattern of governmental commitments in rural areas when the normal restraints are relaxed?" It is to this question that this paper has been addressed.

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