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Rural development has the dual purpose of stimulating economic growth and helping certain disadvantaged groups. The decision-maker is confronted with a difficult task, since these two aims are sometimes at odds with each other.

Rural Development from a Decision-Making Perspective

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□ The differences in geography, resources, institutions, and human concerns among the South Pacific nations make it doubtful that there is a common program of rural development actions that *should* be taken throughout the area. But much can be gained through the exchange of experiences and creative ideas about actions which *could* be taken to enhance the productivity and well-being of rural people. Although an outsider like myself cannot purport to have insight into the specific rural development needs and possibilities of the Pacific region, perhaps I can help call attention to some key variables and interrelationships that are likely to have an important bearing.

My main purpose here is to suggest a point of departure for diagnosing rural development needs, formulating viable solutions, and choosing appropriate courses of action, geared especially to the decisions that heads of operational agencies have to make and the constraints under which they operate.¹

A Complex Task

The task of overall rural development is in many ways more complex than, say, building a dam, running a processing plant, or promoting a particular agricultural practice.

—What one is trying to achieve cannot always be seen or measured, and the payoff may not come until years later.

—Often there are several objectives, some of which may conflict with one another.

—Results are frequently hard to predict, being dependent not only on the vagaries of nature and the economic climate, but also on how people respond.

—More so than the usual technical agricultural undertaking, rural development actions can easily arouse political and ethnic sensitivities.

—There is more than the usual need for the active support and involvement of local leadership.

—Typically there are many interrelated facets, involving careful phasing, good logistical support, and close cooperation with other groups.

—The changes set in motion may have indirect effects quite far removed from both the locale and substance of the program itself.

—The actions taken are seldom cut-and-dried; frequent assessment and revision of plans may be needed.

So it is that the person concerned with rural development—whether national policymaker or village-level worker—has to be more than just a good technician. He needs also to have an understanding of the felt-needs, apprehensions, and responses of rural people. He needs to reach a rapport with key leaders and cultural groupings and to be a creative organizer, astute at the art of timing. Moreover, he must maintain a perspective about the socioeconomic changes taking place and about how his own activities fit into the broader spectrum of private and public endeavors.²

Making the Most of Resources

In rural development, as in other areas of development, there is need for a sense of economizing—the ability to make wise decisions about how most effectively to use the limited funds, technical personnel, and facilities at an agency's disposal (not to mention the ability to steer the energies and resources of rural people themselves). Everything cannot be done in all places for all people at the same time. Part of the task

¹ I am grateful for the helpful suggestions of Dan L. Gunter, Thomas H. Lederer, and Thomas L. Vollrath, who read an earlier draft.

² Two helpful overviews of facets involved in rural development and their interrelationships are: Egbert deVries, "Bringing Systems Analysis into the Rural World," *Ceres (FAO Review)*, Vol. 4, No. 1, January-February 1971, pages 37-42; and A. T. Mosher, "Projects of Integrated Rural Development," *A/D/C Reprint*, December, 1972. (Available from the Agricultural Development Council, 630 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y. 10020. Part of this article was also published in *Ceres (FAO Review)*, Vol. 5, No. 4, July-August 1972, pages 33-37.)

is to do as good a job as possible of carrying out a chosen course of action. But equally crucial is the matter of deciding what to do in the first place—priorities must be established. Difficult choices have to be made about what basic strategies to follow, as well as what specific actions to take and how to implement them. Ways must be found to relate one course of action to another so that they enhance each other as much as possible.

In making such decisions, information about three pivotal questions is needed.

—What are the *aims* of rural development?

—What *resource limitations and other constraints* have to be taken into account?

—What are the *likely results* of the alternatives being considered? (I stress “*likely*,” because how agencies actually perform and how people actually respond often fall short of ideal hopes.)

These three questions lie at the heart of my subsequent remarks.

What Aims and Constraints?

Rural development objectives—though varying from place to place and often couched in more glamorous rhetoric—usually include at least some of the following:

—Increasing domestic supplies of basic commodities.

—Generating more exports, savings, and other forms of capital surplus to spark further growth of the economy.

—Providing opportunities for more rural people to earn a good living, or at least to rise above extreme poverty.

—Reducing population pressures in crowded cities or regions.

—Absorbing refugees or other displaced groups.

—Improving education, health care, sanitation, communications, and other basic amenities of life in outlying rural areas.

—Providing new land tenure rights and other forms of family security.

—Conserving soil, forests, and other natural attributes for the future.

Intertwined with these aims may be additional concerns, such as enhancing the freedoms and status of certain disadvantaged groups, guarding traditional life styles from unnecessary intrusions by the modern world, dampening social unrest or political opposition, and generating a greater sense of national identity. At the

same time, development agencies may worry about the demands that action proposals place on scarce personnel or foreign exchange balances; about administrative complexities, or the risks and consequences of possible failure. While such considerations may not be dominant, they often temper the actions that are selected.

In addition to the many rural development objectives, the decision-maker must also take into account the three basic dimensions of development: 1) the overall *amount* of change to be achieved; 2) the *distribution* of these changes among various people or places; and 3) the *speed* with which these changes take place. For example, a new rural industry may greatly increase the total output and income of a locality yet not have very widespread effects in terms of jobs created for low-income people. Programs related to basic education, health, and family planning, to cite another instance, carry very significant implications for improved progress and well-being in the future, but they may not in themselves be the answer if there are needs for quick impacts.

It is useful also to identify *for whose benefit* rural development is being undertaken. Often the basic concern is helping the *rural people* to improve their own economic well-being and life quality as much as possible. But sometimes rural development action stems from pressures from *other groups* in order to obtain cheaper food, slow down migration to the cities, reduce the tax burdens of welfare programs, or whatever. In the latter instance, rural people may be better off as a result of assistance programs, but this is not automatically the case.

We see, then, that rural development often seeks to accomplish several goals at the same time. This is, of course, not always possible, since a course of action which best fulfills one aim may not be best with respect to other aims. As a result, decision-makers must weigh the “*trade-offs*,” and proposals must be modified to be compatible with several criteria.

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The really important rural development accomplishments may not be so much in terms of tons produced, jobs created, or deaths prevented, as in the new capabilities, attitudes, and momentum generated among rural people—a new sense of individual and community purpose, greater self-confidence and innovativeness, better organizational and leadership ability, and a clearer understanding of the outside world. In this light, rural development becomes the launching pad for a new trajectory of accomplishment and well-being that hopefully can be sustained and amplified in large part by rural people themselves. Some rural development proposals, then, while relatively insignificant in agricultural or economic terms, may be just the thing to get such a transformation process started.³

What Basic Components?

The means employed to achieve rural development aims can be built around three basic components:

1. Changes in *production*: focusing on infrastructure, services, and technology directly related to the growth and modernization of key enterprises or industries. This may go beyond agriculture and fishery to include such potential income sources as forest products, cottage industry, and tourism.

2. Changes in *places*: providing roads, landing strips, drainage, electricity, health services, etc., to enable outlying rural areas to become more economically viable and at the same time better places to live.

3. Changes in *people*: extension education, specialized training, nutritional help, leadership development, etc., to enable rural people not only to respond to new opportunities, but to generate them as well.

Where rapid generation of more food, capital, or jobs takes priority, emphasis on *production* and marketing systems may make sense. But, unless augmented by social protections, income-transfer programs, and special small-enterprise assistance, the benefits to disadvantaged rural people may not be widespread or enduring. One question within this component is whether to foster large-scale commercial development or to especially encourage small holdings and family enterprises.

Concentrating on the development of certain *places* may greatly enhance the opportunities for those who live there and is important in setting the stage for sustained progress. But initially this can entail heavy drains on available capital. And—if one is not careful—there may be excess attention to “luxury” infrastructure at the expense of providing the essentials for generating more income and meeting family needs. A key decision is

whether to concentrate on those towns, production areas, and islands that have inherent growth advantages, or whether artificially to sustain and help less favored locales.⁴

Efforts to modernize production and develop places usually include at least some attention to human abilities and responsiveness. Going a step further to place special emphasis on “*people development*” involves patience but is a vital cornerstone in building towards dynamic self-initiated change and reducing reliance on outside help. Among the key considerations here are the relative emphasis to be given to general education vs. specialized training and to helping youth vs. older persons, as well as the pace at which to encourage rural leaders to make and implement their own decisions.

A cohesive, forward-looking rural development effort would ideally include careful blending of all three of the basic development components: production, places, and people.

Agricultural Programs

Having viewed rural development in this broader context, let us now come to grips with the particular contributions that the agencies concerned with agriculture and allied pursuits are, or could be, making. Chances are that their special focus has been on *production*—stimulating advances in crop, livestock, and fish technology, and providing supportive services to help commercial operators and small holders achieve and sustain these changes. However, this has usually led beyond the technical aspects of production alone. Improvement of land tenure structures, credit arrangements, and input supplies, on the one hand, and commodity marketing and pricing systems, on the other, have tended to become an important element of the agricultural or fishery official's work—if not within his own organization, then at least through links with others.

Commonly—and I judge this is at least as true in the Pacific as elsewhere—agricultural change is viewed as an important vehicle for gains not only in *overall* income and living levels, but also for *reducing the gap*

³ For further discussion of rural development aims in the Southwest Pacific setting and how they relate to action approaches, see: E. K. Fisk, “Development Goals in Rural Melanesia,” *AID/C Reprint*, February 1972. (Available from the Agricultural Development Council, New York.)

⁴ For more about the spatial aspects of agricultural and rural development, see: Douglas Ensminger, “Growth Centers and Viable Rural-Urban Communities,” *AID Development Digest*, Vol. 8, No. 2, April 1970, pages 55-60; and A. T. Mosher, *Creating a Progressive Rural Structure* (New York, Agricultural Development Council, 1969).

in well-being between the rich and the poor. If so, a basic strategy question that confronts agricultural officials is this: *Should we concentrate our research, extension, and other efforts toward development of a highly commercial agriculture in the most favored areas and among farmers who are the most progressive? Or should we consciously give special help to the many "little people" in rural areas, even though they may potentially be less responsive, efficient, or productive?*

The Commercial Approach

The "commercial" approach relies heavily on a trickle-down effect as far as benefits for disadvantaged rural people are concerned. Such benefits may come directly through new needs for hired services by progressive farms, large estates, and related agri-businesses. Or, they may come indirectly through multiplier effects in other industries, availability of cheaper food and clothing, "demonstration effects" of modernized units on nearby traditional farmers, and the like. However, the commercial approach may also result in setbacks for the already disadvantaged: machines may replace workers, tenants may not share in the added income, and lenders and supply houses may be less willing to bother with small operations in remote places.

There are some actions which could be undertaken to spread the positive effects of commercial agricultural development more widely, though this may be at the expense of efficiency and incentives for producers. These include such measures as strengthening the bargaining position of farm workers and tenants, placing constraints on the extent of mechanization or labor imports, offering special incentives for commercial development in outlying areas, and taxing land or earnings to pay for more social aid and services to disadvantaged groups.

It is not necessarily true that an efficient agriculture hinges on having large-scale estates or collective farming systems. As illustrated by the experience in Japan, some other Asian situations, and many parts of the U.S., certain crop and livestock enterprises lend themselves well to relatively small or part-time operations. Small holders often prove to be very progressive once they are aware of new possibilities, if they are provided access to needed services and inputs, and given reasonable prices and protections against risk.

The Direct-Help Approach

Even if efforts to help small holders evolve a productive agriculture are widespread, there still may be rural groups and localities that simply cannot enter commercial streams because of poor resources, dis-

tance from commercial centers, or other reasons. If so, national agricultural officials may face difficult choices about how heavily to weight goals of maximum efficiency and output against desires to assist poverty-stricken people. To what extent should extension workers and other program resources be diverted from more promising agricultural efforts in order to help submarginal farmers? Can these families "make it" in the poorly endowed or overcrowded places where they now are, or should they be encouraged to resettle on other islands or in new farming areas? Is there a future place for them in agrarian pursuits, or would it be better to help them shift to other occupations?

Government agricultural personnel are likely to be confronted with unusual challenges when working with disadvantaged groups, especially if their cultures are in sharp contrast to those of other program clientele. Here it is most important to envision a proposed change as the rural people *themselves* see it. If change is to take place, three preliminary needs must be satisfied.

1. Rural people need *to be aware* of all that is entailed in any effort to change their situation, including the likely outcomes. (Their perception may be quite different from that of the technician.)

2. They need *to feel able* to make the proposed change in terms of having the necessary skills, self-confidence, resources, access to supporting services, and compatibility with new cultural situations.

3. They need to have an incentive. (Having more food or money may not be so important in their minds as other things, such as security, status, or pace of life.)

Program Goals and Administration

Before closing, I would like to call attention to some additional issues that--elsewhere in the word at least--have sometimes been causes of difficulty and disappointment in rural development work.

Some issues are related to program substance itself:

--*Self-sufficiency vs. specialization.* Encouraging a locality, island, or nation to produce most of its own food and fiber needs can help dampen the effects of economic cycles and international uncertainties, as well as put unused family resources to work. However, carried too far, this can be at the expense of fully exploiting comparative advantages in certain products and of generating capital surplus for other undertakings.

--*Creating new opportunities vs. accelerating response.* Some actions (agricultural research, roads, new legal rights, etc.) open up new possibilities for rural people. Others (extension education, credit, subsidies,

etc.) help mainly to speed up response to these opportunities. Careful analysis as to the relative emphasis to place on each is important.³

—*What supportive services?* In focusing on the more glamorous activities directly linked to dynamic change (such as land settlement schemes, new dams, or introduction of high-yielding varieties), it is easy to forget the less visible services that are important for sustained progress: market information, establishment of grades and standards, law enforcement, livestock disease control, regularizing land tenure, etc.

—*How far beyond agriculture?* Rural development undertakings sometimes lead to requests or opportunities for extension and other agricultural services to move into activities quite far removed from agriculture *per se*—community development, for example. Even beyond traditional subject-matter expertise, there are valuable insights about rural behavior and educational approaches that agricultural agencies can offer. Yet, if overdone, this could be at the risk of spreading efforts too thinly or stepping on the toes of other development efforts.

Other issues relate more to program implementation:

—*How much flexibility?* Rural development undertakings require a great deal of careful planning, integration, and follow-through. As a program proceeds, however, new opportunities and ideas may arise, development priorities and felt-needs may change, and new lessons may be learned while a program is under way. Being overly rigid about adhering to original plans, or not allowing for variations at the local level, can result in a program that does not capitalize fully on emerging handholds, or one that becomes tangential to changing conditions.

—*A single coordinating agency?* To handle a comprehensive national rural development effort or an integrated local project, special coordinating agencies are sometimes created. They may carry strong line authority, or they may serve lesser roles as catalysts, funding sources, or vehicles for interagency communication. Whether to establish such a coordinating agency

³ For more about this distinction, see A. T. Mosher, *Getting Agriculture Moving* (New York: Praeger, for the Agricultural Development Council, 1966).

⁴ For some thoughts about how new undertakings can effectively be built into ongoing programs, see: A. T. Mosher, "Administrative Experimentation as a 'Way of Life' for Development Projects," *International Development Review*, Vol. 9, No. 2, June 1967, pages 38-41.

and, if so, what functions it should serve both need to reflect not only the tasks and organizational setting at hand, but also the particular attitudes, insights, and administrative styles of the participating groups.

—*Keeping in touch with program progress.* Failure to keep abreast with what is happening can cause serious difficulties in rural development. Honest feedback about local responses, logistical bottlenecks, coordination problems, and so forth, is needed, but often lacking. Equally important is having agency capacity to react in timely fashion to problems which periodically arise.

—*How much planning and analysis?* Moving ahead with the action itself on the basis of inadequate preparation can lead to serious mistakes. However, most of us can recite instances where so much attention has been given to surveys, reporting, and evaluation that ongoing efforts have been seriously disrupted, and little time or money has remained for implementation.⁴

The Challenge

I have suggested that rural development undertakings—no matter how narrow—be examined in the broader context of the socioeconomic changes taking place, the impacts of these changes on families and localities, and the obstacles which prevent people from adjusting. Attention has been called to the importance of clearly defining rural development objectives as they relate to *human aspirations and concerns*, as well as taking a realistic account of *actual capabilities and responses*. The urgency of carefully weighing viable options to make effective use of limited program and rural area resources has been stressed. The need to link effectively together efforts to modernize production, develop places, and help people reach new heights, has been noted.

So it is that rural development is not just a matter of producing goods, using scientific technology, making routine decisions, or implementing actions mechanically. Its success depends on the fine art of helping people in a creative, forward-looking manner—the art of going far enough to set the wheels of change into motion yet allowing room for others to utilize their capabilities and initiatives, of moving ahead in definitive fashion yet standing ready to adjust to changing circumstances and to learn from those who are close to the people, of being concerned with solid economic progress and efficient operation yet empathetic to the difficulties and values of rural people as they enter the modern world. □ □ □