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COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN ECONOMICALLY UNDERDEVELOPED AREAS

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The study of programs and processes of community development was not only the central purpose of my recent field trip to Asia and the Middle East, but the specific focus of the mission which Dr. Ahmed Hussein of Egypt, and I carried out during the past summer and fall on a mission for the United Nations. I shall not hesitate, therefore, in this memorandum to utilize my observations in the Caribbean Area and Mexico as well as observations on my recent trip. In the course of these 2 missions I have had the opportunity to visit between 55 and 60 villages or rural communities in 11 countries and to study the programs and processes by which local communities mobilized for aided self-help undertakings. In addition to visiting villages and talking with the villagers and those who seek to serve them, I discussed community development programs and experiences with government officials who plan and guide these programs. I interviewed each country's technical or specialized service agencies which work with and through local community organizations and traveled to local areas with the technicians who work with these communities.

The diversity of situations included in these observations provides the challenging question of whether there are common denominators in all the situations which can be formulated as practical working principles or processes of community development programs. My answer is not only that there are, but that a knowledge of these processes is literally a sine-qua-non to effective technical, and even to material, assistance provided by the technical agencies of the home government or by so-called foreign aid.

The following are four basic principles, the validity of which TCA should be deeply convinced if it is to help in the field of community development:

- (1) "Community development" or programs which have the same purpose, which require the same methods, and require somewhat the same operational and administrative machinery, are the going programs of many countries in which TCA is attempting to render all assistance possible.
- (2) In most, if not all, of these countries the development of democracy is a goal equal or superior to that of technical or economic development.
- (3) In every country (where I have been privileged to study these programs) it is assumed or asserted that the common people are the greatest underdeveloped natural resource of the country.
- (4) If TCA intends to offer technical assistance to help implement the programs of these countries part of that assistance should be in the field of community development. We should assist in these countries' programs for developing local communities and the millions of people who live and work in them.

Community development in the countries which I have been privileged to study it is not a sentimental slogan. It is not a Mother Hubbard under which Utopian welfare schemes can be covered. It is not something added to, or different from, other programs of improvement and development. It is basically two things: It is the involvement of the members of local communities or villages in organized self-help undertakings and it is the channeling of National, State and local governmental technical and material assistance into and through organized community groups in order to assist them in their program of economic and social improvement. It is thus both a program including all the contributions - agricultural, industrial, health, educational, and welfare - and an operational plan for administering these programs at the grass root's level. Furthermore, there is no fiction in these countries'

desires and intentions to develop and use democratic processes. Their community development programs are the practical implementation of these desires and intentions. It is their purpose to do this, (a) by the training of "village level workers" who will live and work among the common people, (b) by teaching communities the means and methods of self-help and local responsibility, and (c) helping them to obtain and use all the specialized services which their National, State and local governments can provide.

In the United States the thousands of locally organized groups and communities, through which our technical assistance programs reach the masses, were established in our pioneering period long before we had any specialized government technical services. Without them our giant and diverse gamut of technical assistance to the masses would be greatly handicapped. We ought to have no difficulty in seeing that this is the case in many countries where local democracy and local group initiative and responsibility have never been practiced or even encouraged. Even so, local communities most often villages, in these countries are self-contained and cohesive groups. They are ready-made candidates for community development. It is the purpose of the countries which are promoting community development programs not only to utilize these locally organized groups as channels for reaching the masses for their own technical assistance programs of agriculture, health, education and welfare, but to develop the manpower, ingenuity and enthusiasm of the common people in their economic and social programs of national development. It is worth repeating that not least in their over-all purpose is to develop the foundations of a democracy by developing the people themselves through the development of local communities.

The community development program in India has 8 village-level training institutes now in operation, each of which will graduate 100 village-level workers per year. When this program is fully inaugurated these and

other training institutes to be established will be graduating 2,500 village-level worker per year. It is their purpose to train tens-of-thousands of such workers. Pakistan has the same type of program. In addition to these great numbers of multi-purpose village-level workers many local agricultural extension personnel are being trained who will serve as specialists to work in the same areas where the village-level workers are discovering the needs of the people and organizing them for self-help undertakings. In India, Pakistan and Egypt, health, education and cottage industry, personnel work through these same channels. It would appear that any program of technical assistance supported by outside agencies or governments should work whole-heartedly with these host country programs.

I think the two main reasons American TCA personnel do not work effectively in community development programs are: (1) That they in the past have worked through a different type of administrative and operational structure and for some reason do not see how they can render the technical services of which they are capable through a different type of administrative structure; and (2) many, if not most, of them lack the understanding of community development processes which must be used in the community development programs of the countries where they work.

The administrative procedures of community development varies from country to country but in all cases steps in successful development follow the same pattern. The first step is the involvement of the residents of a local community in systematic discussions of their felt needs, out of which, with due encouragement, they are stimulated to mobilize their local manpower and resources to meet some of these needs.

The second step is the selection of a community undertaking which will yield obvious benefits to all or a large majority of the community.

In selecting such an activity the community is bound to discover that some of its needs cannot be met by even the maximum use of its own local manpower and resources. It is at this point that it either abandons such a proposed undertaking or calls for technical and even material assistance. If the undertaking is within the capacity of the local community to furnish all the manpower and material resources needed, it may complete the undertaking with a minimum of technical assistance.

The third step is the planning and carrying out of the program of activity which will meet the specific felt need. It is my observation that too much technical assistance and too much material assistance, dampens rather than encourages local organized self-help at this point and that the fourth step in group or community development follows ultimately only if the maximum initiative and responsibility of the local community has been encouraged rather than dampened.

The fourth step in community development, is that in which the maximum self-help and energy of the local community and the maximum technical assistance available are joined in further community and technical development. This step is not guaranteed unless the previous 3 steps have been successfully taken and the results accomplished are so obvious that the community is proud of them and anxious to accomplish additional results.

By no means all of the 55 or 60 communities or villages which I have visited in the last 9 months have followed these steps and accomplished community development. Some 10 or 15 of them have and the observations of their accomplishments, together with wider observations in this field, have made me willing to present the steps which I have just described. The early results of aided community self-help need not be spectacular

but they do need to be definite improvements in the economic and social life of the majority of the members of the community. The impulse to further activities is the pride which communities take in their own activities and this, together with capacities they have developed to accept and exercise responsibility, constitutes the genius of community development programs. Until this development has taken place it is difficult for outside agencies, even the agencies of the host country, to penetrate such communities and induce them to utilize technical or even material assistance. Once having made an effective conjunction of their own efforts with the specialized services of technical agencies, and having received some material help from government agencies local communities have still greater faith in their capacity to meet their own felt needs. Furthermore through their contacts with specialized agencies people of a community become aware of some basic needs which they had hitherto not recognized. Their desires for better education, better health, better farming are stimulated, and then met by their own self-help and the assistance of the agencies and funds which their governments attempt to provide.

The above statements sound philosophical but they represent concepts of the tasks at hand which are in keeping with the intellectuals and top technical leaders of some of the countries who are using such concepts as their guiding motives in national development programs. These programs require practical implementation. Every extension method we have developed in the United States is useful to help in this implementation. They are not only methods which are needed but they will work, do work, in community development programs. The shortcoming of American extension advisors is not that they do not understand these methods but that they seem not to know how to use them in any other organizational framework than in an American type of extension organization and administration. Most country

leaders have the philosophy of aided community self-help. They are implementing this philosophy by programs which they call community development. Out of our own democratic experience of local and national democracy and a sizable volume of research findings in group processes we have a contribution to make to those host country technicians and administrators.

It was my mission to try to understand these programs and try to appraise the ways in which TCA can cooperate with them. My judgement is that the points in these community development programs to which TCA can and should offer assistance are (1) in Training Institutes where hundreds of village-level workers are being prepared to work with groups. Men who are expert in group methods could and should be assigned to these tasks. (2) Above those who operate the training institutes are the official persons who plan and guide the whole community development programs. In India these are the State Development Commissioners. TCA persons equally knowledgeable in group and community processes with those who work in the training center programs, but more mature and experienced in diplomatic relations, should be assigned as counterparts to these host country officials. (3) Someone on the Country Director's staff should guide these men. He should also be expected to assist other TCA technical personnel in agriculture, health, education and welfare to understand the community development programs which they are supposed to serve, and of course he should cooperate with and in every way possible assist the National officials and technicians in community development policy.

Let it be said frankly that rendering aid in this particular field of technical assistance is almost sure to be a delicate undertaking.

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Only carefully selected persons should be assigned to those positions. In such positions, however, they could introduce their contributions into going programs at points where they would leaven the whole program of community development. In doing so they will be working with established programs instead of attempting to promote schemes of service which are not in keeping with host country programs or administrative structures.

There are even more important reasons why TCA personnel should work with and through community development programs. They are working in economically underdeveloped areas and the less economically developed an area is the more it is isolated from the outside world and thus the more local affairs dominate the concerns of its people. Local community concerns are the chief concerns of village people and the local community or village is the only organization in which they have ever participated. In many, if not most places, it is an ineffective organization because it has never been given the opportunity, often not permitted to exercise local responsibility. It is a fallacy to believe that such responsibility can be handed down to it from above. It must be developed by involving village people in the solution of problems that are important to them.

It is my repeated observation, however, that people living in these extremely culturally isolated rural communities are either not aware of some of their basic needs, or if aware of them often live in the belief that fate has destined them to continue to live with unsatisfied needs. When, however these people are helped to meet and systematically discuss their common needs and offered technical assistance in meeting

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their needs something approaching miracles begins to take place. They build roads and schools, clear their streets of animal manure, build latrines, make compost piles, etc., etc. Then larger community projects are undertaken for the accomplishment of which they receive not only technical but material assistance they still generally contribute more than one-half of the costs of the improvements that are made. They usually supply practically all the manual labor, nearly always part of the materials, quite often part of the cash costs, and in a majority of cases the foremanship or management of the improvement enterprises. It is a great mistake to believe and act upon the belief that the only contribution that unlettered peasants have to offer to community improvement is their manual labor. Not only their spirit and enthusiasm but their improving capacities for accepting responsibility are the dynamics which local community action develops. To act on any other assumption lessens both the extent and spirit of self-help and automatically fosters dependence on outside help to meet all their needs.

It is both physically and financially impossible for economically underdeveloped, or any other countries, to provide technically trained manpower to make all the economic and social improvements in the life and work of their millions of common people which are needed and confidently looked forward to by both TCA and host country national leaders. Such improvement does and must depend on the development of aided self-help local community effort. That is what practical community development means. Technical assistance rendered at the request of self-motivated well-organized local communities hundreds of thousands of them, is many times more effective because it was asked for. Material assistance provided to successfully accomplish projects and programs

into which local communities are pouring their manpower, ingenuity and enthusiasm is generally only the minor part of the cost of needed undertakings. The given amount of material assistance, therefore, accomplishes more good.

More important than both of these is the fact that once self-help activities are initiated they have a strong tendency to be self-perpetuating. Having realized their own capacities, and having made effective conjunction with the sources of both technical and material assistance, local communities not only grow strong themselves, but in the process help solve large national problems of agricultural production, health, education and welfare.

Community development does not solve a nation's problems of international trade, of building large industries, of building large irrigation projects, or even the scientific problems of plant and animal genetics. But it is not a mere slogan. It is a systematic program of involving the millions of common people in helping to solve their own local and their nations' problems. It is a method by which technical assistance, no matter from what source or agency provided, reaches the common people and becomes inculcated into their methods of production and ways of living.