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RURAL DEVELOPMENT: RHETORIC AND REALITY

In this paper I would like to offer a view of the kinds of problems that characterize rural development as an area of study and policy, a field which has been for a long time one of the main pillars of teaching, research and advisory work at the Institute of Social Studies. First I will try to explain in a general way what rural development is all about. Then I will describe the two kinds of rhetoric which mark the ways in which development practitioners on the one hand, and academic social scientists on the other, think and talk about rural development, and how both these forms of discourse tend to obscure the real dimensions of rural development problems. Then I will give three brief examples of some current issues in rural development studies and policy. Finally I will offer a personal view of some general principles - a kind of approach or philosophy - which I think should be the basis for our future work, in the Institute and others like it, on rural development problems.

Rural Development

Rural development, obviously, involves something more than agricultural development alone. Equally obviously, however, it is very much concerned with agricultural development, in countries where the majority of rural men and women - and many of their children - earn part or all of their living in agriculture, and where most of the non-agricultural activities in rural areas are in some way directly or indirectly related to the fortunes of the agricultural sector. Thus, when we talk of 'rural development', we are using this as a convenient shorthand for 'agricultural and rural development'.

There is, surprisingly, considerable agreement across different theoretical and political camps about the role which agriculture and the rural population are supposed to play in 'development', or in the overall transformation of the economy and society and the conquest of poverty. Briefly and simply stated, this transformation required that agriculture

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itself should become more productive, while at the same time the economy as a whole, and the rural economy with it, should become progressively less agricultural as the other sectors grow.

There is also some general measure of agreement on the broad alternative paths or strategies by which this rural transformation may be achieved. There is one general family of strategies which we may call 'capitalist' (involving large-scale, privately-owned farms operated with hired labour); another which we may call 'socialist' (involving large-scale collective or state farms), and a third path involving the creation of a productive and efficient agriculture based on a structure of relatively small farms, of relatively equal size, operated mainly by family labour, which we may broadly call the 'populist' or 'modernised peasant economy' strategy (cf. Ghose, 1983). Some would argue, while others would hotly deny, that this third path is compatible with either capitalist or socialist transformation of the economy as a whole, or even that it is the form which most types of agricultural production must inevitably take in future, in both 'first', 'second' and 'third' worlds; an interesting idea which will perhaps be much debated in future years.

There are several successful historical examples of each of these three broad strategies or paths of rural transformation. Where debate begins is on the matter of the strategies and policies necessary to achieve one or the other of these paths, since they involve not only the promotion of technological progress in agriculture but a specific strategy in relation to the various groups or classes in the rural population in order to achieve the forms of organisation of rural production and appropriation necessary in each case. None of the successful historical case of agrarian transformation has been achieved without major institutional reforms (including land reforms) involving drastic changes in the position of these various rural groups and their relations with each other; not surprisingly, none of these reforms has been accomplished without political conflict.

With these remarks I hope to have indicated: first, that rural development lies somewhere very close to the centre of development studies and policy and second, that rural development is an extremely political matter. This reality should be reflected in the ways in which we think about it, study it, teach about it or involve ourselves in it. As Terry Byres has observed, of all the issues which development strategies in the poor countries of the world must confront, perhaps the most important, the most challenging and the most politically difficult is the so-called 'agrarian

question'. An unresolved agrarian question is one central feature that unites the poor countries of Asia, Africa or Latin America, whatever the broad strategies - capitalist, socialist or populist - by which a passage away from mass rural poverty is sought (Byres, 1986, p. 8).

Examples of the successful transformation of rural economies (that is, the successful resolution of 'agrarian questions') in modern times are the exceptions rather than the norm. 'Rural development' in this sense - which I think is its proper sense - has not occurred in the great majority of third-world countries, despite the extraordinary growth in the last few decades of rural development planning activity and budgets, and of the international, bilateral, national and local-level bureaucracies whose job is to make rural development happen. A survey of rural development efforts around the world since the last world war would reveal the following kinds of results.

In some cases, we can observe the virtual breakdown of food production and distribution systems on a large scale. In other cases, both agriculture and the rural economy as a whole have stagnated, and this stagnation is often coupled with extreme levels of rural poverty and inequality due to the absence or failure of structural reform efforts. In other cases (there are many of these in Asia, from which most of my examples will be drawn since this is the part of the world with which I am most familiar) successful strategies to increase agricultural production, with or without structural reform, have been coupled with the failure of agriculture to provide employment or increased incomes for the majority of rural men and women, while at the same time such industrialisation as has occurred (whether in rural or urban areas) has not provided mass employment for the men and women whose labour is no longer required by a more productive agriculture.

These sobering outcomes should not obscure the fact that rural development efforts, and the many dedicated people who work in the various specialised agencies involved in them, have achieved some notable successes in some countries. What I want to suggest, however, is that such successes have most often been partial or piece-meal; progress in some fields, stagnation or decline in some others. Whichever paths of rural transformation the countries of the third world may have tried to follow, most have not achieved it; and it is in this sense that I feel justified in suggesting that rural development - as a process of overall transformation of rural economy and society whose objective is the conquest of mass rural

poverty - has not occurred, in most cases.

Two kinds of 'rhetoric'

When we consider the way in which professional people think, talk and write about problems of rural development, we find that this discourse is marked - like the discourse of development studies and policy generally - by two kinds of unfortunate and misleading rhetoric: the first is that used by policy-makers and practitioners, and the second that used by academic social scientists. The two kinds of rhetoric are different, and this helps to explain why academics and practitioners tend to be so critical of each other, and to have such problems communicating with each other; but both of them contribute in their own way to obscuring the realities of rural development problems.

The first kind of rhetoric is that found in the discourse of development agencies at all levels, both international and national, governmental and non-governmental. It is reflected in a peculiar jargon which changes rapidly according to changing fashions, has a positive, action-oriented ring to it, and sounds quite pleasant to hear, but has little concrete meaning. Such words and phrases as:

- take-off
- modernization
- balanced growth
- coordination
- backstopping
- participation in development
- grass-roots development
- planning from the bottom up
- enhancement of the role of women
- optimum child care packages
- social soundness analysis
- integrated rural development (1).

We all recognise the words, but what do they mean? Much of the instrumental value of this rhetoric lies precisely in its imprecision of meaning (like much of the language used by advertising and public relations agencies). Partly because of the role played in inventing and diffusing this language by United Nations and other international agencies (which have to

make tortuous efforts to avoid any overt political content in their discourse) it is particularly skilful at obscuring the political aspects of development problems. It is a rhetoric of optimism, one that gives the feeling of a great deal of confidence and control of what happens in the world, and some anthropologists have made a study of it (for example Robertson, 1984: Chapter 2, from which much of this paragraph is borrowed). One kind of rhetoric which development agencies notably lack, on the other hand, is that which might help them to explain - and others to understand - the frequent failure of their own efforts to attack mass poverty: 'the persistent discrepancy between intention and achievement, the repeated failure of costly efforts to bear fruit' (Robertson, 1984: p. 62).

The second kind of rhetoric is quite different, but gets equally in the way of realistic and constructive understanding of rural development problems. I am referring to the peculiar private languages which are the professional capital of the various academic social science-disciplines, and the competing models, theories or paradigms within each of them. Much of the problem here stems originally from the unfortunate turn taken by the social sciences in Europe in the middle of the last century, when the general, holistic study of human societies split up into the separate disciplines which we now find in the universities (although recent developments in higher-education policy in the Netherlands mean there will soon be few universities in which one can still find them all): anthropology, sociology, economics, political science and so on.

Although they profess to be engaged in the study of 'human behaviour' (the things that people do, and the things that we do, individually or in groups, to each other) the various disciplines have sliced up and parcelled out various aspects of this subject-matter among themselves, in sheer defiance of the rather obvious reality of actual human societies, that all these aspects are combined, interrelated, in fact more than that: not only related to each other, but even part of each other. Each discipline has then developed its own abstract models, in which as the anthropologist Eric Wolf has observed:

"... all factors not covered by the model are ruled out of order. If the models leak like sieves, it is argued that this is either because they are merely abstract constructs and not expected to hold empirical water, or because troublemakers have poked holes in them. The specialised social sciences, having abandoned a holistic perspective, thus come to resemble the Danae sisters of classical Greek legend, ever condemned to poor water

into their separate bottomless containers." (Wolfe, 1982: p. 10 f.)

When professional academics from these disciplines are turned loose on the real world, for example by involving themselves in rural development projects, they have gained the reputation among development practitioners of being extreme pessimists, and also of being a considerable nuisance. In the eyes of development practitioners, as Robert Chambers has noted: "... academic social scientists appear to indulge in esoteric and incestuous debate, muttering to one another in private languages. These academics do not understand the constraints of the real world. They criticize but do nothing constructive ... and whenever they do get involved in programmes and projects, they only make trouble. They are incapable of writing anything short and clear, or of meeting deadlines. They question priorities instead of getting on with the job. They look for things going wrong; they write about failures not successes ... Rural development is hard enough without them around to make it harder." (Chambers, 1983, p. 30)

This critical attitude of social scientists, as Chambers himself reminds us, has made a contribution to the understanding of rural development problems: "Looking back over the past three decades, we can see that without such attitudes it would have taken much longer for the development professions to recognize the deficiencies of the 'trickle-down' approach, the tendencies of local élites to capture the benefits of development, the misery of many poorer people, and the plight of so many women." (ibid.: p. 30 f.) The problem I want to raise here, however, is not so much the critical attitudes of academic social scientists, which on the whole I regard as a good thing - the extremes of rural poverty in the third world are an outrage, and so are some of the policies, programmes, projects and bureaucracies which profess to be busy correcting it - but rather the limitations inherent in the social-science disciplines with their abstract and fragmented, but also universalist models of social, economic or political change in rural societies, in which the special, distinctive features of actually existing societies disappear.

Most of us are trained to be quite fluent in one or another of the two kinds of rhetoric I have described - some of us are even bilingual, so to speak, and can jump about nimbly between the two - but neither of them is of much use in helping to understand the problems of rural development in actually existing societies in the real world, the terrain in which the struggle for rural development is being played out.

Institutions which are active in education, research and policy work on

rural development problems have to stand between these two non-communicating poles (of 'social science theory' on the one hand, 'policy and practice' on the other) and try to forge more productive and dynamic links between them. One aspect of our approach must be a resolute attempt to avoid the pitfalls of either kind of rhetoric, and to search for more useful ways of understanding the realities which both of them tend to distort or conceal.

To avoid misunderstanding, I should explain that this is not meant as an argument against 'theory' in the social sciences. But it is an argument for a return to more holistic theories which require breaking down the artificial barriers between the disciplines in which we have been trained. It is also an argument for a more open and flexible approach grounded in the detailed comparative study of actually existing societies, which will help us to understand better the diversity of processes at work and to come to terms with the great diversity of outcomes; to understand better how the general 'tendencies' predicted by abstract theories interact with these processes in actual societies, each with their own histories and peculiarities, each with their own political configurations at international, national and local level: each with their own peasants and landless workers who are not neat analytical categories in the theories of one or another academic discipline, but real flesh-and-bones landowners, merchants, moneylenders and agents of the state and who in these actual historical confrontations are quite likely to upset the tidy applecarts of simplified theories of agrarian change (cf. Das, 1983: p. 293 f.).

The same general approach - 'critical' if you like, but critical in the positive sense of the term: not chronic 'fault-finding' but 'questioning, exercising careful judgement or observation' - should characterize our attitudes to the discourse and behaviour of the development agencies. We do not necessarily have to throw out all their jargon, but to see it as it really is: as a set of vague notions without concrete meaning, which require to be given concrete meaning in actual situations. This attitude is not one of intellectual pessimism, but rather one which tries to inject a note of realism in development efforts; for example, by careful assessment of what actual forms (if any) of 'participation', 'grass-roots development' or 'enhancement of the role of women' are possible in societies whose aspirations for social and economic justice, or whose local-level development efforts under government auspices are more realistically described as 'grass without roots' (cf. Jain et al., 1985).

Consequences of the 'green revolution'

My first illustration concerns the social and economic consequences of the 'green revolution' in Asian food grain production. As we all know, the pessimism about food production in the large and growing populations of Asia in the 1950s and 1960s has now been replaced with optimism. Rapid growth in food production, it now appears, is possible not only in the 'reformed' agrarian structures of East Asia (Japan, Taiwan, South Korea and the People's Republic of China) but also in the 'unreformed' structures of South and Southeast Asia, such as India and Indonesia - the latter having made a remarkable transition in the past 15 years from being the world's largest importer of rice to a situation in which rice self-sufficiency, and even a modest surplus, may now be expected in normal years.

There has been a long and complex academic debate about the agrarian consequences of this strategy of commercialisation and intensification of small-scale agriculture, aided by 'green revolution' technologies. The debate has been heavily marked by the second kind of rhetoric to which I referred earlier (2), and has to a large extent repeated a similar debate occurring in Russia and Western Europe at the beginning of this century concerning the consequences of commercialization of peasant agriculture. One school - which in the earlier debate is associated with the name of Lenin - argues that these processes inevitably result in the social and economic differentiation of peasant society and its eventual polarization into two opposing classes of large capitalist farmers on the one hand and landless wage workers on the other. Another school argues - as did Chayanov in Russia - that small peasants are not destined to disappear; their family-labour farms are not less, but more efficient than large capitalist farms, and they can effectively adopt new technologies so long as there are higher-level agencies (whether cooperatives, state or private enterprises) to take care of the various necessary elements in modernised agriculture (the provision of inputs, and the processing and marketing of outputs) which they cannot themselves handle effectively because of their small scale. This second school of thought, not surprisingly, is also reflected in the policy statements of non-socialist governments and donor agencies involved in 'small farmer development' programmes, including those who may never have heard of Chayanov.

When we examine the actual outcomes of agricultural commercialisation and technological change in different South and southeast Asian societies, it becomes increasingly clear - and no amount of academic rhetoric can conceal

the fact - that what is occurring is neither the 'Leninist' nor the 'Chayanovian' outcome, but rather various forms of combination of the two. On the one hand, large capitalist farms using wage labour can be found, and landlessness certainly has increased; especially when we remember that the 'landless' are not only to be found in rural areas, since growing numbers of the rural dispossessed are now eking out a precarious existence in Asia's crowded cities. On the other hand, small and marginal peasant 'family-labour' farms have not disappeared, but have generally grown in number, so that there is no overall tendency towards an increase in average farm sizes. To understand the particular forms that agrarian 'differentiation' has taken in different Asian societies, some other elements must be brought into the picture.

One important element is the political one, and in particular the ways in which different Asian régimes have confronted two imperatives that are both necessary for their own survival; on the one hand the need to ensure food supplies to growing urban populations at prices that do not provoke urban riots and on the other the need to extract these food supplies from rural producers by means that do not provoke rural rebellion. Both rural and urban political upheaval are important and recurring features of Asian political history, and there has been no state since classical times that has been prepared to leave to market forces the fulfilment of these two political imperatives (3). This, perhaps, is something that those who advocate de-regulation and 'free-market' solutions to current African food crises might usefully remember (4).

The ways in which the non-socialist Asian states have faced this double imperative have all involved a strategy of incorporating dominant rural groups - those who combine economic and political power at local level - as privileged yet dependent clients who in turn become their agents of political and economic control in rural areas, their allies in the task of policing the countryside. This patronage takes varied forms, but involves always the channeling of state-controlled resources to these dominant rural groups. In those countries where agricultural production itself has been subsidized (through provision of cheap credit, fertilizers etc.) local rural élites have often become directly involved in agricultural production, on relatively large farms using wage labour (Indonesia and Malaysia are examples); in other countries where food production is subject to a net tax and therefore relatively unprofitable (for example in the Philippines) rural élites are less interested in a direct involvement in farming but have obtained privileged

access to the new, more profitable opportunities on the 'upstream' and 'downstream' side of small-peasant production (in banking operations associated with farm credit Programmes, dealerships in agricultural machinery and chemical inputs, marketing and processing operations). These contrasting patterns obviously affect what happens to the structure of farm sizes.

Looking to the other end of the agrarian structure, the widespread persistence of small and marginal farms and their failure to disappear is not necessarily the result of any greater Chayanovian efficiency of these small production units; rather as many studies have shown, the members of these households do not survive on their 'sub-subsistence' farms alone, but are involved in a combination of agricultural and non-farm activities, whether in the village or - as is increasingly the case in much of Asia - through the seasonal or 'circular' migration of one or more household members to urban centres in search of additional incomes. The failure of 'green revolution' studies, and peasant studies generally, to take account of the widespread phenomenon of 'part-time' farming is another important cause of the limitations of conventional theoretical models in explaining the actual patterns of social and economic change in Asian rural communities. The outcomes of agricultural intensification strategies in different Asian countries cannot be understood by the imposition of one or another kind of universal theoretical model, and certainly not by models which focus on the economics of agriculture alone.

Rural industrialization and non-farm employment policies

My second illustration concerns a policy issue which has been much emphasized in recent years, that of rural industrialization and non-farm employment. Faced with the inability of agriculture to absorb a growing labour force - even when agricultural production is growing at a healthy rate - and with rapid migration to marginal occupations in the crowded cities whose large-scale industries have a dismal employment creation record, it is not surprising that many development agencies have turned eagerly to the development of the rural non-farm sector as a sort of last trump card in rural development.

There are several well-known success stories in this field in Asia; both in socialist China (whose rural small-scale industries grew at an estimated rate of 30 % per year during the 1970s) and in the market-oriented economies of Japan, Taiwan and to a lesser extent South Korea. It is worth

remembering also that in the more historically remote experience of Western Europe's industrial revolution, rural small-scale industries based on relatively simple technologies were the original base of the development of manufacturing industry, before the later process of rural 'de-industrialization' which occurred as capital shifted back to the cities in the 19th century.

Most recent policy efforts in this field, in Asia and other parts of the third world, have attempted to find 'short cuts' to rural industrialization: to imitate a part of those East Asian success stories without first creating the structural conditions which made them possible in the first place. Critical comparative studies of the experience of different countries are of great importance here, not for mere academic interest but precisely to inject a note of realism which is often lacking in current policy discourse. Most of the Asian countries in which these efforts are taking place are characterized by 'unreformed' agrarian structures, in which agricultural production itself may or may not be growing but is marked by a highly unequal distribution of land and agricultural incomes. Meanwhile, all those who have studied the East Asian success stories agree that perhaps the single most important element in their success has been the implementation of rather comprehensive agrarian reforms (whether socialist reforms in the case of China, or reforms of the 'modernised peasant economy' type as in the other East Asian countries); these reforms made possible the relatively equal distribution of growing agricultural incomes, which in turn were the single most important source of demand for the products of rural industry: 'a flood of pent up middle income demand was released in favour of rural industrial products' (Saith, 1986: p. 91) (5).

In the unreformed agrarian structures of the other Asian countries, policy efforts towards rural industry and non-farm employment promotion rely on a more piece-meal strategy, which does not address problems on the demand side but focuses instead on the supply side, by trying to provide the kinds of inputs which provide rural people with the capacity to engage in non-farm production: skill training programmes for rural men and women, appropriate technology diffusion, small investment credits, and infrastructure development such as road networks, rural electrification and small industry estates. Such efforts may serve an important facilitating role, but they do not themselves generate employment; they may fall flat on their face when confronted with the lack of demand for rural non-farm products. Such comparisons raise the question whether short cuts of this

kind are possible at all, in the absence of the dynamic linkages provided by a reformed agrarian structure. The powerful growth-releasing and poverty-reducing effects of agrarian reforms are well documented, but most countries of developing Asia are unwilling or unable to follow this 'lesson' of history (Saith, 1986: p. 92). The question remains, however, whether rural industrialization can be achieved at all in the absence of agrarian reforms, which many would consider the real 'last trump card' in rural development.

Another aspect of rural industrialization strategies also demands our attention, and raises profound and difficult questions about the objectives of these strategies. In contrast to China and Taiwan, Japan's early industrial development in the late 19th century (i.e. before the post-war agrarian reforms) was based on agrarian inequality and extreme rural poverty: and particularly on the forced flow of young, unmarried women and girls from impoverished marginal-peasant households into manufacturing employment, on a temporary basis with high rates of turnover, under harsh and appalling work conditions, long working hours (the norm being 12 - 13 hours per day) and with wages below minimum subsistence level, made possible only because they supplemented the sub-livelihood incomes of the rural households from which they came. As Ashwani Saith has written: "The mill girls of the textile industry were nothing more than disposable washcloths; they entered the mill gates fresh and clean, and left them soiled and limp; in the interim the surplus value squeezed out of them fuelled the Japanese industrial revolution. But" (he goes on, and it is good to include this more hopeful note) "the reality and the ideology of such exploitation also bred its own negation, and it is to the increasingly active forms of protest of these girls from the late 1880s onwards that the origins of modern Japan's labour movements can be traced." (Saith, 1986: p. 45).

These conditions, observed a century ago in Japan, will not be unfamiliar to those of us who have observed more recent processes of manufacturing development in other Asian countries; whether in home-based work through putting-out systems, in small- or medium-scale sweatshops or in larger factory-based employment in textiles, electronics or other industries which also recruit their labour from marginal-peasant and landless households in unreformed agrarian structures and, particularly in the case of factory employment, from the young unmarried women in these households. We may note for example the work of Maria Mies on the lace-makers of Narsapur in India (Mies, 1982); Pineda-Ofreneo's account of

the hundreds of thousands of rural women in the Philippines garment industry (Pineda-Ofreneo, 1982); or recent studies of rural female labour migration to urban or small-town factory employment in Java which have documented that the wages received by these young women are below their own daily subsistence costs, necessitating subsidies from their rural parental households (Mather, 1983; Wolf, 1986). When manufacturing wages are insufficient even for a single young woman's basic needs, as Gavin Jones has noted, "this supplementary employment may serve to hold people in rural areas, but it is not serving as an engine of growth, dynamising the rural sector and creating the higher incomes on which further diversification can be based" (Jones, 1984: p. 150).

The entry of rural women into wage employment certainly has double-edged and contradictory implications. On the one hand these women suffer wage discrimination as well as exaggerated gender-specific forms of exploitation and labour control (6). On the other hand it has been argued that the movement of women out of the status of 'unpaid family workers' in peasant households and into wage employment, and their new status as independent wage earners - however appalling the conditions under which these meagre wages are earned - may represent one necessary but not sufficient step on the long road of struggle for social and economic emancipation, for mobilization and collective action. It remains a major question (and one which does not seem uppermost in the minds of those in charge of rural industrialization programmes) whether women's involvement in the early stages of industrial transition can be achieved without the harsh work conditions and miserable earnings which have been and are so common in the experience of so many countries, and which were also common in the early experience of industrialization here in Europe.

Target group strategies and the 'NGO phenomenon'

My final illustration concerns not government policies and strategies but the dilemmas faced in many countries by non-governmental agencies involving themselves in rural development. The 'NGO phenomenon' has become an important part of the rural development scene in recent years. In most Asian countries there are by now not hundreds but thousands of NGOs working in rural areas. Some of them are very small, some of them enormously large; some operate with a minimum of financial support from outside, while others are dependent on large grants from donor agencies such as the large donor NGOs of the West, and even sometimes on grants

from their own governments.

The rapid growth of these agencies, especially since the early 1970s, reflects a general disillusionment with the capacity or political will of governmental agencies to address the real interests and needs of various disadvantaged groups in rural society. Most NGOs base themselves on the so-called 'target group' strategy and define their target groups as one or more of the structurally deprived and disadvantaged groups in the inequalitarian societies where they work: the rural poor, the landless or near landless; rural women in general, or specific disadvantaged categories of rural women; ethnic or caste minorities, and so on.

Their philosophies are based on the conviction that alternatives to prevailing 'top down', bureaucratic styles of development are both necessary and possible; it could be said that they want to turn 'grass roots development', 'self-reliance', 'participation', 'conscientization', 'mobilization' from rhetoric into reality. Their personnel - at least in the early stages of NGO formation - are marked by a high degree of personal dedication and commitment and the determination to work directly with their target groups, acting as catalysts to promote the collective, participatory efforts by which these groups may hope to improve their social, material and political positions in society.

The initial 'heroic' phase of almost boundless enthusiasm and optimism about the NGO phenomenon is over. It has now given way to a more sober and realistic appraisal of the extremely limited room for manoeuvre of genuine 'grass roots' organizations and movements and strategies of mobilization and collective action, in structural contexts which are inherently unfriendly to such initiatives.

I noted earlier that the target groups of NGO efforts are defined in some way by their structurally subordinate position in an inequalitarian society (whether this is the subordination of class, gender, caste, ethnicity or whatever); it is not surprising that efforts by, with or for such groups to secure a greater share of resources, opportunities, power and influence in society are actively, sometimes violently, and often successfully opposed by the dominant groups in society which have consistently deprived them of access to these things in the past. Efforts at mobilization therefore are conflict ridden, prone to obstruction and sabotage from powerful elements in society whose interest lies in the status quo; when they show signs of success or growth - for example, when an isolated pilot project threatens to evolve into a large-scale movement - they are often vigorously opposed by

government bureaucracies.

This is also not surprising when we link the NGO phenomenon to another phenomenon, the relative helplessness of bureaucracies in many cases (once we look behind their confident rhetoric) to control and successfully implement their own development efforts. 'Target group' strategies are now common among government agencies too; their frequent lack of success in this field, compared to the apparently greater potential of NGO efforts at the 'grass roots', may lead to bureaucratic fears that NGOs will encroach on areas of activity (even perhaps on sources of funding) that have previously been under their control. This helps to explain, for example, why even such seemingly politically innocuous initiatives as NGO-led community health care schemes, clean drinking water projects or non-farm income generation efforts - while they may be encouraged by government agencies at the level of the national capital - may encounter stiff opposition, even outright sabotage, by local bureaucracies. Increasing efforts are made by bureaucracies to exercise control over the activities of NGOs, to prescribe what they may do, in what ways they may do it, and what they may not do.

Faced with these problems, NGOs have difficult decisions to make, and it is these kinds of decisions that mark what I called the end of the 'heroic' phase. NGOs and their leaders may become coopted and the popular energies which they originally represented channelled into carefully controlled, officially sanctioned activities, engaging in projects that do not essentially challenge the status quo; in this case they may be allowed or encouraged to grow and prosper. They may themselves become the recipients of state patronage and become gradually transformed into little more than extension agents of those bureaucracies whose methods and objectives they had set out to replace with more genuinely participatory mobilization for social change. The rhetoric of grass-roots alternatives to bureaucracy may persist, but in reality they may themselves come increasingly to resemble those bureaucracies; what remains may be little more than a somewhat more free-and-easy style, a more relaxed attitude to such bureaucratic institutions as project evaluation and book-keeping, and a relative absence of uniforms.

For others who decline to become coopted in this way, trying to remain true to their ideals, and to the needs and aspirations of their target groups for social and economic justice - this is, after all, what the 'mobilization of structurally disadvantaged groups' is all about - a more difficult future lies

in store; a future of continuing tension and conflict, obstruction and restriction of their efforts by local powerholders and bureaucracies, and in some cases for the leaders of target groups and their NGO counterparts physical harassment and violence, imprisonment, torture or death.

This is no exaggeration - cases of both these examples could be documented from any Asian country - although I have posed the dilemma in terms of two extremes wherein reality many NGOs try carefully to follow a middle path, one necessarily full of compromises but not always involving the complete abandonment of genuine efforts at social change. These problems deserve our careful attention and study as we emerge from the earlier, more naive stage of enthusiasm about the NGO phenomenon and its potential.

By way of conclusion

My purpose in giving these brief examples has been to provide a basis for suggesting some general elements which might usefully characterize our approach to these and other problems in rural development at the Institute of Social Studies and other similar institutions concerned with development studies. Three elements, I think, are essential.

First, *interdisciplinarity*. The kinds of problems which I have given as illustrations, together with the more general problem of rural transformation which I outlined earlier, cannot be usefully approached within the narrow confines of any one of the academic social science disciplines. To adopt an interdisciplinary approach, and to do this well, is more difficult and challenging than the conventional monodisciplinary focus; the rejection of barriers between the disciplines must not be allowed to lead to the loss of discipline (by which I mean analytical rigour) and certainly does not mean the abandonment of theory. The crucial difference, it seems to me, is that our criteria of relevance - what we decide to include in our framework of analysis of a particular problem - becomes a 'heuristic' rather than a discipline-bounded one, by which I mean simply: whatever helps us to understand better.

A second necessary element, related to the first, is a learning and teaching strategy based firmly in the *comparative approach*, requiring detailed analysis of the contrasting experiences of rural development in actual societies, with recognition of the particular historical, social and political contexts at national and local level in which agrarian changes take place, in which strategies and policies have been formed and introduced and

have succeeded or failed. In this way we may hope to confront and come to terms with the diversity that exists in the real world - whatever uniform tendencies some abstract theories might suggest - and to learn from it, to see the ways in which general 'tendencies' interact with specific conditions to produce particular outcomes, and to understand in this way that 'success stories' may offer valuable lessons, but not directly transferable models for other societies to follow or for external agencies to impose.

Finally, a continuing concern for issues of *social and economic justice*, as part of our understanding of what rural development means and as an essential part of the meaning of 'development' itself, however unpopular this emphasis may be in some quarters, at some times.

Implicit in these principles (which are already characteristic of this Institute's approach to development studies, although like all general principles they tend sometimes to be forgotten) is also the assumption that this Institute is and should continue to be an institute of international education; this is what justifies its existence and why we should continue to aim to provide education rather than 'training' in the narrow technical sense. Some technical training can and should be incorporated in our various teaching programmes, but there is little reason to bring students all the way to Holland simply for technical training of the kind that is increasingly available in their own countries or at least in regional centres closer to home.

I think it necessary to emphasize and re-emphasize these principles, especially at the present time when each of them is in various ways under threat, in a world which seems to be in full retreat where development policies and development studies are concerned. Given the widespread failure of development efforts and the persistent problems of global economic recession, there is mounting pressure from many sides, both nationally and internationally, to look for short cuts and simple technical remedies in the blind search for economic growth at any cost. Education, the social sciences and interdisciplinarity with them are under attack in this country, as in many others, as more weight is put into purely technical training. The philosophy of specialization under the spurious guise of rationalization seems likely to push social scientists back into narrow monodisciplinary frameworks; as some universities in this country lose their departments of sociology, others their departments of political science, others their departments of social history, it seems that interdisciplinarity in social science is going to require a lot of travelling by train between universities

in future. In this atmosphere, the detailed comparative study of anything at all, and particularly of the bold social and political experiments that are a feature of all genuine development efforts, may also come to be seen as an unnecessary luxury.

Our role as an institute of international education, however, is not to follow blindly the changing priorities of governments or development agencies; these priorities will anyway change again in future, as they have done regularly in the few decades since international development assistance, development studies and this Institute were born. We should not be busy keeping up with the times; we should be keeping ahead of the times and ourselves trying to influence them, always questioning prevailing orthodoxies in theory and prevailing trends in policy.

Interdisciplinarity, comparative studies and the concern for social and economic justice are not luxuries in development studies; they are its very foundation, and we cannot afford to abandon them.

Notes

- (1) The last example (integrated rural development) is an interesting case where the discrepancy between rhetoric and reality has been so great that such masters of development rhetoric as the World Bank and the U.S. Agency for International Development have been quietly abandoning it since about 1980, only seven years after inventing it, leaving many countries with somewhat puzzled Directorates of Integrated Rural Development in their wake. We may compare the rise and decline of 'Community Development' in the years 1950 - 1957 (cf. Staatz & Eicher, 1984: p. 21).
- (2) Some of the most extreme examples of this academic rhetoric are to be found in the debate on the 'mode of production in Indian agriculture', which for some years occupied many pages of the Indian journal 'Economic and Political Weekly'.
- (3) Boeke notes the efforts of the VOC more than two hundred years ago to keep rice prices low for the urban population of Batavia: 'tot elke prijs moest de rijst goedkoop blijven "om het gepeupel rustig te houden"' (Boeke, 1948: p. 16).
- (4) The political dilemmas facing African states were vividly highlighted when Julius Nyerere, visiting the Institute of Social Studies in 1985, described the demands being placed on Tanzania by the IMF: "We are being told to raise the prices paid to our farmers by 40 percent in real terms - this at a time ... when the national income is declining, and when the real value of wages and salaries in the urban areas has already declined by more than 50 percent over the last five years. It is not surprising that the social price for accepting IMF terms is very often riots, with the police or the army having to be turned on the people." (Nyerere 1986: p. 394)
- (5) For those who are accustomed to thinking of the 'market-oriented' East Asian countries as oriented primarily to manufacture for export markets, it is important to note that the greatest proportion of manufacturing output in those countries during their periods of rapid

rural industry growth was destined not for export but for domestic use (Oshima, 1984: p. 31).

- (6) These are often combined with age-specific forms of exploitation and labour control in the case of young women and children, as many accounts of the recruitment practices and working conditions are rural child migrants to sweatshop employment in Bangkok have documented.

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TECHNOLOGIETRANSFER AN DER SCHNITTSTELLE VON SANFTER UND GROSSTECHNOLOGIE

Wenn in der Entwicklungspolitik das Thema Technologietransfer zur Diskussion steht, dann sind es in den Industrieländern meist zwei Gruppen, die miteinander in eine heftige Auseinandersetzung geraten. Eine dritte Gruppe, die eine Mischung - "blending" - zwischen moderner und traditioneller Technologie zu konzipieren versucht, gewinnt erst in allerjüngster Zeit an Bedeutung (vgl. Bhalla, James, Stevens 1984 und Weizsäcker, Swaminathan, Lemma 1983). Die Vertreter der beiden Hauptströmungen fühlen sich als Anwälte und Sachwalter einer Konzeption, die sie für die richtige halten. Jede der Gruppen bringt immer wieder neue Beispiele, die zeigen sollen, daß die Konzeption der jeweilig anderen falsch ist. Die einen sind dafür, Brunnen und einfache Reisschälmaschinen zu bauen und basisdemokratische Kooperativen zu schaffen, um die Unterentwicklung in der Dritten Welt zu überwinden (vgl. Stewart 1978), die anderen treten für die Errichtung computergesteuerter Produktionsanlagen ein und stützen sich auf hierarchisch organisierte Verwaltungssysteme, um Wachstum und Fortschritt im "Süden" zu erzielen (Emmanuel 1982).

Die eine Gruppe spricht von der Notwendigkeit des Transfers von industrieller Maschinenteknologie, um Armut und Rückständigkeit in den Entwicklungsländern zu mindern. Die andere Gruppe sieht gerade im Transfer modernster Technologie das Entstehen von Abhängigkeit und als Folge davon Armut und Rückständigkeit in vielen Ländern Lateinamerikas, Afrikas und Asiens. Das einzige, was beiden Parteien vordergründig gemeinsam ist, ist, daß sie etwas in der Dritten Welt - und im Austausch zwischen Industrie- und Entwicklungsländern - *verändern wollen*. Sie hinterlassen in jedem Fall Spuren, mit welcher vorhergehenden Analyse, mit welchen Entwicklungsvorstellungen und Wertstandpunkten auch immer sie in den verschiedenen Ländern aktiv werden. Uneinigkeit herrscht über das Ausmaß und die Wirkung der Veränderungen.

Diejenigen, die den Transfer modernster Maschinen forcieren, sehen als Haupthindernis die Kapitalknappheit in den Entwicklungsländern. Diejenigen, die die small scale technology fördern wollen, sehen in den