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Occasional Paper 1

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Stimulating Local Development

Overseas Development Institute

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**Agricultural Administration Unit
Occasional Papers**

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Overseas Development Institute

Stimulating Local Development

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1976

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Introductory Note

Stimulating Local Development is based on work carried out in 1975 by one part of the Agricultural Administration Unit which deals with the subjects covered. Other Occasional Papers are in course of preparation on the management of pastoral systems (Stephen Sandford). There is, of course, consultation between all members of the Unit on all these subjects.

The method of producing these papers is somewhat new. The final texts are normally built up by sending a preliminary statement to a 'network' of correspondents, each of whom has some particular knowledge and interest in the subject. Written comments are received and amalgamated into a revised text. Three 'networks', with some overlap in membership, are operating at present (this one; Irrigation; and Pastoral), each with about 250 members. Participants include responsible executives, academics from several different disciplines, scientists/technicians, and donor agencies.

The subjects covered here were originally discussed in separate and partly overlapping network papers, which have been edited and combined in this publication. 'Local Diagnosis' and 'Consulting Farmers' rely heavily on quoted comments from network members, while 'Farmer and Community Groups', although modified by some excellent comments, is mainly from our own work. A further Occasional Paper originating within this particular network, on Planning, will be produced later. We have not, at this stage at least, produced a 'Summary of Recommendations', mainly because we believe that the details, and the verbatim comments are particularly important at the present time, and might well be distorted by further summarisation. We particularly hope that this publication will be found useful not only to individuals, but to training institutions in the field of agricultural development.

Guy Hunter
Janice Jiggins
(Editors)

ODI/AAU
1976



Chapter 1: Preliminary Statement

One major focus of the research and advisory unit (AAU) at ODI is on the point of contact between field services and farmers. The problems involved are partly technical, partly social, and partly administrative. In order to get past wide generalisations, the work has been divided into four sub-subjects; but it could easily branch out into more. It is a single field but the sub-division is useful because it will tend to attract involvement of people with special interests in a particular aspect, and will help in grouping relevant material. 'Social' is used in its full implications, to include economic elements concerned with the structure and functioning of local societies, and of groups within them, as well as social and political elements affecting customs and values and the distribution of local power. 'Technical' is used to include agricultural science and ecological factors.

The first four sub-subjects are:

The diagnosis of local technical and human potential

One of the most common causes of failure or partial failure in agricultural programmes is that the development package offered to farmers is either not profitable or not practicable to them, having regard to their total farming system (equipment available, labour, rotations, cash flow, consumption pattern, tenure, etc).

The element of *profitability* has been mainly a field for agricultural economists (eg mixed cropping versus pure stands, relative costs and earnings from extensive versus intensive methods). Less definitively economic is the question of risk and risk-aversion, particularly where staple food crops or high cash inputs are involved. Consumption pattern may be relevant where a new crop or method is suggested; for example, short-straw varieties reduce cattle fodder or thatching, machines instead of cattle reduce milk and dung, pure stands may reduce dietary variety through the year, additional labour requirements may compete with social 'consumption' (weddings, etc) or preclude profitable off-farm activities.

Practicability relates most often to investment, tenure and labour supply, particularly labour-peaks. Investment refers to necessary infrastructure — water-control and drainage, fencing, storage, road access, land-shaping. Tenure relates to constraints on the farmer's decisions caused by his dependence on a landlord or other patron. Labour supply difficulties usually crop up when changes in planting, weeding or harvesting dates are altered by new crops (or varieties), new rotations, or an additional crop.

'Human potential' relates to social structure and *mores*, including the pressure of community values on the individual and the degree of dependency of individuals on dominant individuals or groups within the community; it depends also on levels of commercial sophistication.

It is clear that at least some of these factors may be critical in considering

what improvements to output, incomes, and welfare could be made in 'an area'.

The basic proposition to be tested in this study is as follows: 'Before a programme is drawn up for a given area, a reconnaissance of the area and a diagnosis, discussed with farmers, of what is practicable and profitable must take place.'

Area. How large 'an area' needs to be studied for programming purposes — the farm, the village, a group of villages, a 'block' (India) or micro-region (Mexico, IBRD Project) of 50,000–100,000 population? The answer will depend partly on both ecological and social factors. On the technical/ecological side, natural divisions are suggested where the plain gives way to hills; between irrigated and rainfed areas; by major differences in rainfall, soil and vegetation. On the social side the line where one 'tribe' or markedly different cultural group gives way to another, or historical divergencies in settlement may suggest where the division comes. Thus a degree of uniformity of possibilities over a fairly wide area might exist where both ecological and cultural characteristics are similar (eg in parts of the Gangetic plain, parts of African savannah); on the other hand, there can be marked differences, both technical and social, even within an area as small as a 'block'.

A different approach is to define the area for study by the lowest point where minor programming and servicing activities can be focused, which may be at the 'block' or micro-region level, allowing for minor differences between constituent villages. In practice, this may have to be the *programming* area.

Note: (1) that a further issue of still smaller *service* centres for farmer-contact is also certain to arise; such centres need to be within walking or bicycling distance of the majority of farmers — say a 5-mile radius? (2) that a *planning* area will probably be larger than the programming area, because of the need for special personnel.¹

Methods. How is a diagnosis to be done? It involves two main factors — consultation with villagers — *listening rather than telling* — and skilled technical and economic appraisal. The technical element will involve agronomy (including animal husbandry), and probably some engineering experience (water, roads/bridges, land conformation). It will often involve a decision on whether investment must take place *before* farming changes are practicable or profitable. This investment may be physical or administrative (eg land consolidation).

Resources — personnel and costs. Severe problems of personnel and training arise. Even India, rich in personnel, could not at present put a team of economist, agronomist and engineer into each of 5,000 'blocks'. Can existing extension staff be trained to do this work if supported, ad hoc, by more specialised skills for particular purposes? Could universities or research centres do a limited number of depth studies, modified locally by extension staff or by mobile teams? How long would either intensive or superficial diagnosis

1 Planning is used in its usual sense for a wide activity, including much more than agricultural programmes — eg road layout, investment, financial allocations, etc. Programming will here be used for the make-up of the actual agricultural 'package' offered to farmers.

take? How much authority needs to be delegated to what level? What addition or alteration to training is needed? How much can local consultation achieve? What is the contribution of agricultural research stations?

Consulting farmers

As a result of the large volume of valuable comment received on local diagnosis, we found it useful to produce a separate paper on the whole issue of consultation with farmers. For, although it is now widely agreed in general terms that this is an absolutely necessary step in the formulation (and indeed application) of local agricultural programmes, there proved to be a lot of argument about *how* and *by whom* this consultation can best be done. In particular, the role of existing field staff and of more senior and expert staff, and the role of farmers themselves in this dialogue, raised very interesting and valuable discussion. Apart from some ODI editorial notes, Chapter 3 contains many striking, verbatim quotations from 'network' members.

Farmer and community groups

Both the evolution of local dynamic action and administrative requirements point to the need for some collaborative, group effort by farmers. Formal co-operatives have been widely suggested as the solution. But they have had very mixed success, either economically (bankruptcies) or socially (domination by local power-holders). There are many examples, all over the world, of success in the operation of small groups, of 20, or 50, or 100 farmers, as contrasted with large co-operatives with several hundred members at primary level.

Is there a sequence from small groups to larger federations of groups? How are small groups formed? Are groups most effectively formed round a single facility (pump, store, dairy) or a single difficulty (flood control, access, disease-control, marketing, transport)? Is group-formation best approached through existing 'leadership' or through general meetings? How is this ascertained? In what circumstances are 'model farmers' or 'progressive farmers' useful for diffusion, or divisive? In what circumstances do elected local committees or institutions, or party cells, appear to work efficiently or inefficiently?

Note that farmer groupings may arise almost directly from diagnosis. If a particular constraint is clearly identified, a grouping to overcome it by collaborative action may be an obvious outcome. There is here a side-turning into an extra sub-subject — extension training and methods.

Local planning and co-ordination

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 deal with the process of diagnosis and identification of viable possible programmes, in consultation with farmers, and with choices in the formation of farmer groupings for executive action. It remains to fit this process into a framework of local planning and co-ordination, and, in turn, to fit local planning into a framework of national (state) sectoral and general planning.

The network will attempt this task in Autumn of 1976, taking into account

the conclusions set out in chapters 2 to 4. An Occasional Paper will follow in due course.

General approach

Two general points may be mentioned. First, the work is concerned with the *general* application of agricultural development effort, *not primarily with projects*, to avoid the trap of non-replicability of projects while allowing their possible use as organisational experiments. Second, it will be coloured by earlier work of the Reading/ODI Programme, which paid particular attention to three factors – the differences in organisation which are implied by different levels of local development; the criteria for choice of institutions; and the concept of sequences in technical and institutional policy.

Chapter 2: Local Diagnosis

Guy Hunter

I Introduction

We had a most valuable response to Network Paper No I on Local Diagnosis. This chapter sets out the main comments and suggestions we received, and indicates what reformulation is necessary and where conflicts of opinion arise.

The main comments were almost entirely analytical (in part, semantic). This is as it should be, since the first step is to reach a formulation of propositions which is reasonably accurate and watertight within its assumptions. But it goes only part of the way. If this research is to have more than academic interest, its final presentation must be modified in three ways:

- (a) It must pass a test of feasibility as a recommendation to policy-makers and executives. We have, so far, much too little material as to the real possibility of using the suggestions in the field (financial costs, manpower, demand on management).
- (b) It must be presented in shorter, simpler terms (though known to be based on detailed analysis and evidence), so that it reaches the form of a policy recommendation which can be readily handled in the policy-making process.
- (c) Some at least of the assertions upon which it rests must be supported by more detailed field evidence. It must, however, be said that the present propositions do rest on conclusions reached by a considerable number of widely-experienced people as distillation of the experience in the field and of their knowledge of reported 'cases' in the development literature.

It may be as well to put down, in the baldest, over-simplified form, the central propositions underlying this work.

- (a) 'Before an agricultural programme is drawn up for a given area, a reconnaissance of the area and a diagnosis, discussed with farmers, of what is practicable and profitable must take place.'

Out of this proposition a host of questions arise. What *kind* of reconnaissance and diagnosis, by whom undertaken, at what cost in time and money, how related to other programmes, how discussed with which farmers, to whose benefit, how related to existing national policies, with what relationship to technology and research, etc etc. It is to these questions that the analysis is addressed.

- (b) 'In relation to the active involvement of farmers a much wider range of possible grouping and institutions, including very small and informal ones, should be considered, with particular relevance to the inclusion of small/poor farmers, and with reference to their current capabilities and to sequences in their possible future growth and needs.'

A similar set of questions arises from this proposition, and are dealt with in Chapter 4.

- (c) 'In order to achieve optimum fit between local agricultural programmes and local potential, considerable authority for local programming must be delegated to local levels. Further, since there must be a degree of integration between agricultural and other social programmes, the wider planning process must give an opportunity for such integration at local level.'

This proposition raises a number of issues on planning and on administrative structure. It is probably the most difficult and least analysed of the three propositions. It will be dealt with in a later paper.

Between these bare propositions and the pages of detail which follow (which might one day become a teaching or training syllabus, but certainly not a policy document) lies, we hope, some intermediate level of guidance on policy choices which might well be illuminating and useful to decision-makers.

II Comments, suggestions, reformulations¹

A Some general issues

1 Problems of order

Several respondents emphasised the inter-relation of local diagnosis, farmer groupings and co-ordination of services, indicating that a systems approach, putting relationships at the centre, is what is needed (Gotsch, Bessell, Stevenson). We are well aware of this issue, but are currently thinking in terms of analysis of individual aspects; synthesis will, we hope, come later. A second problem of order concerns the choice of approach – from central government down or from situations up. We have almost wholly chosen a bottom-up approach, partly as an antidote to 'centrism' (Chambers²) and partly because it seems more logical to identify what is needed locally first and later to consider what central decisions are needed. Admittedly, this gives the appearance of neglecting the manifold constraints from central policies and administrative regulations under which local executive staff labour. In some degree this omission will be remedied at the *end* of the analysis, and in particular in a forthcoming paper on Planning, in terms of recommendations on how these constraints can be loosened by central action.

2 Realism

The problem of top-down constraints (plans, policies, politics) is one of two major issues of realism, the other being the feasibility of such refinement in local planning, which was mentioned in the introduction. One respondent (Hyden) suggested that it might be more profitable to concentrate research on ways of improving the top decision-making process. There were further suggestions that too much emphasis on management and institutions might lead to neglect of the real clients – ie farmers (Hyden); to neglect of spontaneous private enterprise and initiative (Thornton, Lawson); and that too

1 A list of respondents quoted is appended to this chapter.

2 R.C. Chambers, *Managing Rural Development*, Uppsala, Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1974.

much emphasis on studies and surveys might lead to neglect of implementation, unless the 'studies' were done by the implementers (Watts) — three useful warnings. As to the major issues of central constraints, it is only possible (in this work) to try to maximise improvements within what latitude there is; to criticise development orthodoxies and mythologies upon which decisions are often based; and not to underestimate the room for manoeuvre and improvement of systems which does exist in many countries.

3 Local political influences and interest-conflicts — Who benefits?

Perhaps the greatest insistence among respondents was on this issue (Sarma, Carey Jones, Harriss, Joy, Biggs): many felt it was the crucial issue from which analysis should start. Seen from the centre, Sarma spells out one dilemma very clearly:

'...conflicting interests between the rich and the poor. The available institutional finance is pre-empted by the medium and bigger landlords. If special institutions are created only for the small and marginal farmers, firstly they may not be viable, and secondly, they are not consistent with the requirements of the area-based agricultural programme. A common institution with a commanding voice for the small and marginal farmers, though desirable, may not work in practice unless some safeguards are there. These safeguards need to be spelt out.'

This dilemma is put in terms of one possible solution — the creation of a national agency or programme for small farmers *alongside* a more general programme (the 'area-based agricultural programme'). There *may* be an alternative — indeed, this document is mainly discussing such an alternative — by which the 'area agricultural programme' is itself built up from smaller local programmes, based on local diagnosis and programming in which the 'who benefits?' question has been specifically asked and, as far as possible, answered in a way which includes the small man's interests and capacities as a major concern. We shall return to this issue.

4 Methodology of this research

A question was raised (Miller) about the methodology of this research work itself; should we not develop a design for testing the hypotheses which are coming forward? We now have notice of this question, and will have to answer it; but we would prefer to deal with it at a later stage, when the question of methods of future work will have to be faced squarely. At this stage we would only indicate: (a) that strict testing or 'proof' may be not only impossible but inappropriate, and (b) that, insofar as the test is largely the test of experience, the material for it largely exists in the recorded experience of the last 20 years; and that additional tests will appear as and when programmes and projects which coincide with the approach which we have suggested themselves undergo the hard test of practice. It is partially true that our suggestions are based more upon a record of failure where other guidelines are used than on evidence of positive success of what we recommend,

save in relatively few cases. In the main, we are suggesting for test ideas which can be established or discredited only in action.

B Semantics and analysis

A good number of semantic/analytical points were made. For example, 'credit' is too wide a concept unless defined by long, medium or short-term, by institutional or private, and by 'subsidised' or 'unsubsidised'.

More important is the dissection of 'diagnosis' into its elements. Røling suggests: (a) determination of needs and problems; (b) diagnose — ie identify causes of needs and problems; (c) identify solutions; (d) test solutions for relevance. Variants include: (i) survey; (ii) diagnosis; (iii) design. A fairly full range would be: (i) survey; (ii) identify problems; (iii) analyse causes; (iv) design solutions; (v) pilot test and appraise; (vi) plan a programme; (vii) implement; (viii) evaluate; (ix) modify (Joy, Carey Jones, Collinson and work of Chambers and Belshaw).

Two short comments on these points. First, they matter only if separate identification of an element in the process shows either that this element is normally missing and should be included, or that it will be handled by a different person or type of skill. For example, many of the facts and some of their causes may well be obtained by consulting local farmers, whereas elements in solution or design are likely to need considerable expertise. Second, many elements, separately named, are in fact dealt with by a single mind almost simultaneously. A skilled agronomist will see the fact, know its technical cause, and go on to possible solutions. This is mentioned only because the impression of complexity is much reduced if the thought process is seen synthetically and not discretely.

A word is needed about the phrase 'identifying technical and human potential'. 'Potential' is realised only (*mise en valeur*) if there is a solution, technical or social (Røling), or if a solution could be found by research (mainly technical), investment (often infrastructural), or social action.¹ Carey Jones points out that people react to opportunities offered, so that the offer of a new opportunity may change the attitude identified in a pre-offer survey — this is a dynamic, not a static process. Collinson emphasises that 'diagnosis', as used, spills over into planning and into implementation, since a technically and socially possible 'solution' is incomplete unless the marketing, the supply and the service functions are, or can be made, adequate to complete it. 'Practicable and profitable' in the first main proposition implies all this.

C Objectives

A number of comments (Biggs, Carey Jones, Joy, Harriss) emphasise the need for clarification of objectives before the processes of diagnosis and programming take place. Is the emphasis on production and incomes, or on welfare

1 A. T. Mosher's useful distinctions between immediate and longer term potential are also needed here.

(consumption)? On small farmers only, or including marginal farmers, landless labour, and other 'poor'? On employment? Who benefits, who loses from proposed solutions? Some of these issues will be taken up in the paper on Planning. In fact, the original propositions were based primarily on the increase of small farmer production and incomes, both as a prerequisite for welfare, consumption and employment and as a means both of improving the situation of at least one very large rural group and of assisting national output and resources.

D Diagnosis

1 Survey and identification

There is a very large literature on survey, including the district planning literatures, not to mention the even larger literature on research methodology (interview, sampling, statistics, etc). The problem for this work is to narrow the focus so sharply that we confine our concern to our own specific objective, ie that of improving the local programming for local agricultural development. The need for such narrowing is heavily emphasised in another way — that the main constraint which must be faced is the constraint on staffing, expertise, and finance, if the processes of diagnosis and programming are to form part of normal agricultural administration.

Comments from respondents, although pointing in certain useful directions, did not reach down to details either of content of survey or of staffing. That surveys should be 'operational' rather than 'academic' (Carey Jones) has implications for *relevance*; if to that is added the constraints on staff and time, it is obvious that neither the full social survey nor the full farm-management study are on the agenda. On farm-management Collinson's book¹ (especially pp 21-124) is particularly helpful on surveys in traditional agricultural situations, with a ray of sunlight in his observation that similarities in the assets and problems of traditional agriculture make it easier to identify 'typical' situations than it is in developed commercial agriculture, where farm-by-farm consultancy becomes necessary. The book as a whole naturally considers far more detailed work than we can consider for widespread local diagnosis.

As to the *range* of the survey/identification, the technical, economic, and social aspects will require varying lengths of study at a number of levels of expertise. The technical side will certainly require an informed judgement by one or more staff with locally relevant training (argronomy, livestock, engineering) at a higher level than the junior extension staff; depending on the amount and quality of earlier data available (eg soil survey), such judgement may require testing. Again, a skilled assessment is required on the economic side (labour, costs, timing, prices; Joy quotes a case where it was found physically impossible for the farmer to execute the production plan recommended by the extension officer); it may be found to have wide

1 M. P. Collinson, *Farm Management in Peasant Agriculture*, New York and London, Praeger, 1972.

applicability in areas of similarity in production type and size of holding. As to social judgement, local information may be of key importance; but it must include necessary life-support activities (non-farm) and the role of women (Bunting), both of which affect what is practicable and what is economic. The survey/identification will also need to include discussion with farmers. Collinson emphasises that to ask the right questions requires expertise while Pickering stresses that vital information which local farmers and officials can provide; some further work (Leach) is certainly needed on the balance between consultation and expertise.

The need for *altering* local conditions, as found (research link, tool technology, infrastructural investment) was stressed (Johnston, Collinson *et al*). This would be identified in outline at the survey stage, but would require further investigation before the final design/programming stage.

Many projects are preceded by initial survey, often of a more detailed nature than could be replicated; yet why is it that results in the subsequent programme are not always good? (Leach, quoting the university surveys in support of the Kenya Special Rural Development Programmes). This is a valid question, which perhaps the further evaluation of SRDP (Dr Peter Hopcraft, IDS, Nairobi) may answer. There are obvious answers – eg that government did not follow survey findings – but there may be other answers, in the relevance of the information recorded, in the divorce between surveyors and implementers, or in lack of imagination in subsequent programming.

For the scale and range of the survey process has to be, and in practice will be, narrowed by some *idea* (Carey Jones) of what a possible solution might be; and this idea will be generated or tested in the course of the survey, and will tend to focus questions to farmers and to exclude irrelevant information. This imaginative factor may well require non-local staff – Harriss stresses that the bureaucratic position, training and motivation of local junior staff unfits them for this, supported by Winkelman ('the motivation of bureaucracy is a primary constraint on development'). See also 'Staff and training' below. Refer also to the ASAARD Programme (J.C. Mathur, FAO, Regional Office, Bangkok), where senior officials are brought into direct dialogue with both farmers and local officials. This programme is under test in six Asian countries.

2 Design and programming

The initial, identifying part of diagnosis is already slipping into the next stage – design and programming of solutions. Some testing of ideas generated will be necessary (Watts), including testing of the economic element, not only costs and benefits to farmers, but also to government (Carey Jones), including recommended investment costs, if any. Solutions may be staged, to avoid too big a jump for farmers (Stevenson – 'the best is the enemy of the good', and Carey Jones). At this stage design is slipping in turn to implementation, and there was unanimity that the implementing staff must be heavily involved at the design/programming stage, and that research staff should be closely involved as well, both on agronomy and on other forms of technology.

3 Area

In the choice of size of area emphasis was laid in two directions. First, the importance of identifying *differences* between areas (Harriss) and types of farming system (McCallum). Second, the possible predominance of a technical factor, eg irrigation, forestry conditions (Pickering). On administrative grounds, it was agreed that the main planning unit and source of senior expertise would be at a higher level than the largest area for effective contact with local farmers for local programming. Service centres might be below that level. The raw material for district planning would be those ideas from local diagnosis which had weathered the necessary tests, both agronomic and economic (Carey Jones).

4 Staff

Several respondents pointed out that senior expertise would not be needed permanently in local areas, but only at critical moments of survey and design/programming. This would include senior technical staff, fully trained agricultural economist, occasionally sociologist/social anthropologist in an operational role. Two respondents (Watts, Collinson) suggested that the survey/design team might actually operate from a research centre, meeting executive officials in the field. No suggestions were made as to time to be taken, or the balance of skills in the diagnosis team, or the balance between implementers (local and full-time officials) and 'consultants' (borrowed official or research staff). These are major issues, both of cost and of effectiveness, and will have to be faced. Training of staff is dealt with below; several respondents complained of lack of emphasis on this in our first document.

There is no need for many words on training. Since a largely new approach to local areas is involved, emphasising local differences, the needs of small farmers, fuller consultation with farmers, support of possibly quite small groups, and participation both in local survey and the design of local programmes, courses for all departmental staff at field level will be needed, to explain and to ensure full comprehension of the type of approach needed. Short seminars, in which both different types and different levels of staff take part together (ASAARD Programmes) may well be extremely useful. It has been found valuable in that Programme to take the higher levels of staff from different areas (from the junior level) so that junior staff are not tongue-tied by the presence of their own immediate superiors.

There seems, in fact, to be some measure of agreement on three points. First, *some* experienced staff external to the staff of the area concerned – from district or above, from research stations, from university – will be needed to provide a new look, stimulus, imagination, and relevant expertise. India has agro-economic research centres, linked to both the university and the Ministry of Agriculture; other countries may need to use or found a similar resource, or perhaps to attach more social scientists with an agricultural bias to their technical research centres. Second, the local knowledge of farmers, both about their society and about their farm, must be more sensitively and intelligently used. Third, for this purpose a good deal of simple retraining of extension staff

(of all types) will be needed as to the quality and style of their approach to local communities.

III Tentative conclusion

We must emphasise that this chapter deals with 'diagnosis' at the sub-district ('block') level, and that its objective is to lead to an *agricultural programme*, not simply to provide a wide range of information on many subjects as the raw material for wider district-level planning. But two points must be borne in mind. First, that the agricultural programme *will* involve considerations of market access — ie roads etc — possibly of landshaping or irrigation by one of several possible means (engineers), possibly of post-harvest arrangements — storing, processing and possibly of credit arrangements (banks or other institutions). Thus, while the central element of diagnosis concerns what can be profitably produced and sold, the diagnosis team will have to remember these other departments or institutions which could be involved, and to consult with them at a very early stage.

Finally, we have given only some broad hints at the possible composition of the 'team'. First, it should certainly contain appropriate members of the existing local extension or other staff, especially because those who will execute must be involved in deciding on the programme. Second, it will certainly need some higher expertise — at least an extended visit of, for instance, the District Agricultural Officer, probably an agricultural economist and quite probably the appropriate engineer (road, water, landshaping or whatever).

The call on staff, however, will not be high in every local area. Some areas will already be successful; in some areas the problem will not be that the 'package' is wrong (technically, socially, or economically) but simply that it is poorly administered. The real need for fresh diagnosis is in those (many) areas where the package simply is not acceptable to a large number of farmers, where both analysis of causes of failure and revision, possibly radical, of the package itself are required. The hidden danger in this statement is that, all too easily, it could be assumed that the technical part of the package is right, and therefore either the farmers or the staff are the cause of failure. The social and the economic elements must be right too.

Chapter 3 deals with consultation with farmers in much more detail. At this stage it is probably not safe to say more than that the diagnosis operation in a local area would probably need a core team of perhaps four members (two local staff, two more senior and expert) for one to two months, with necessary consultation of additional specialists if needed. This should be enough to produce an outline of a new approach, for approval and then for field testing. A major 'report', with massive investment would, of course, need much more time and expertise.

Respondents quoted in Chapter 2

Mr M. Adams: FAO Development Project II, Sudan
Dr Susan W. Almy: Rockefeller Foundation
Dr J.E. Bessell: Department of Agriculture and Horticulture, University of Nottingham, England
Dr S.D. Biggs: Ford Foundation, Dacca
Professor A.H. Bunting: Agricultural Development Overseas, University of Reading, England
Mr S.H. Butterfield: Bureau for Technical Assistance, USAID
Mr N.S. Carey Jones: Department of Politics, University of Leeds, England
Dr M.P. Collinson: CIMMYT, Nairobi
Dr C.H. Gotsch: Ford Foundation, Beirut
Mr J. Harriss: University of East Anglia, Norwich, England
Dr G. Hyden: University of Dar es Salaam
Professor B. Johnston: Institute for Development Studies, University of Nairobi
Professor L. Joy: Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, England
Dr A.S. Kahlon: Dean, Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana
Dr Rowena Lawson: Department of Economics and Commerce, University of Hull, England
Mr J. Leach: Ministry of Finance and Planning, Gaborone
Dr A. McCallum: FAO, Rome
Professor L.F. Miller: Rockefeller Foundation, University of Ibadan
Dr A.K. Pickering: Ford Foundation, Jakarta
Professor S. Rao: Agro-Economic Research Centre, Andhra University, Waltair
Dr N. Röling: Agricultural University, Wageningen
Shri J.S. Sarma: National Commission on Agriculture, New Delhi
Mr B. Stapleton: Pan African Institute for Development, Douala
Dr K.A.P. Stevenson: FAO, Rome
Mr P. Stutley: Ministry of Overseas Development, London
Mr J.M. Texier: Merignac, France
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Mr E.R. Watts: Pen-Y-tae, Swansea
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Chapter 3: Consulting Farmers

Guy Hunter

I Introduction¹

A very brief mention of the need to consult farmers, as part of diagnosis, was made in Chapter 2. But there is more to this question than meets the eye, and there is some controversy, I think more apparent than real, among correspondents.

There is no controversy about the fact that farmers have something useful and even vital to say – to wit, their first-hand knowledge of where various shoes pinch them (shortage of labour, time cash, access; inefficiency and untimeliness of supplies and services; landlord pressures; irregular supply of irrigation water; irregular maintenance of pumps, etc, etc; peculiarities of their soil – or environment – or parts of it; customary restraints). The problem centres on how to get this information, how to get only *useful* information; and who is to get it.

Note that the preceding paragraph refers mostly to *difficulties*. It is also widely agreed that to ask a farmer 'What do you want?' in an open-ended way results in demands for schools, clinics etc, or simply a shopping list of everything he would like to have if he was richer and had more and better land. Often, he does not in fact know of good things which it is possible for him to have.

There are broadly two schools of thought about how to get information from farmers and who should get it, and a third sub-school. One school emphasises that this requires skilled staff. A good economist, or agronomist, will be able to ask key questions, and leave out unnecessary or unprofitable ones. Further, a good deal of *imagination* is needed to spot a possible, quite new solution to a local problem; some correspondents feel that existing junior field staff are so conditioned to think only in terms of the official 'package', and to obey instructions, that they will never show the power of spotting an alternative which isn't 'in the book'. Carey Jones, for example, suggests that first a skilled person must have an idea of what might work, and try it out on the farmers, even to the point of field pilot action, and collecting comments, difficulties and farmer reaction generally. This school of thought as a whole is apt to imply a visiting team of skilled diagnosticians; and the result would begin to move towards a proper 'survey', with the dangers of a fairly long time period, expensive in trained personnel. The issue we face then will be the *minimum* period over which a useful skilled assessment can be made. Collinson (see below) has suggested two months as feasible. Here we run into 'surveys and planning'.

The second school would put more emphasis on using existing, necessarily fairly junior field staff to obtain farmer opinion, on four main grounds: (a) those who get the information should be those who will be involved in executing the eventual programme; (b) there are not enough experts, and they take too long;

1 A list of respondents quoted is appended to this chapter.

(c) they have greater difficulty in getting real contact and frank responses from farmers; (d) the process of consultation is not 'one off', but, ideally, fairly continuous, because the situation is always changing and programmes need equally constant adjustment.

The third sub-school emphasises that the only people to whom farmers will talk freely and frankly are their fellow farmers; so that the task of getting farmer-information is really a task of evolving farmer-groups and thus to a light degree institutionalising the existing informal flow of farmer cross-talk and mutual influence.

The question of who gets what kind of information depends largely upon the answer to a prior question — to what use will the information be put? If the answers are needed as part of the data for a farm-management analysis of what cropping patterns are (a) feasible (labour constraints, tools, etc), and (b) optimal, in terms of returns to labour or returns to capital (mainly land) and inputs, then the questioner will have to have had at least some training in agricultural economics. If, on the other hand, the answers are needed, and are sought in virtually every block, simply to elicit fairly simple facts — 'When is your labour peak?', 'Do you ever employ hired labour?', 'Does your land get flooded in summer?', 'To whom do you sell crops?', etc — so that palpable mistakes in the programming for the area can be avoided, then it might well be possible, with some retraining, to use existing junior field staff, with some more expert support when difficult issues arise. This contrast would lead on to a distinction between 'proper' farm-management advice, of perhaps the two-month variety, probably carried out in *sample* blocks in similar 'crop ecological zones' (L.H. Brown, quoted by Deryke Belshaw), and quick local consultation with farmers in any and perhaps every block, which should be a continuing habit of action, which can be done by local field staff once they get, or can be given, the knack of it.

This preliminary note oversimplifies the contrast between 'schools of thought' and does less than justice to the thoughtful and more balanced material from correspondents. The note will therefore abandon the format of Chapter 2, and give direct verbatim extracts from a number of correspondents, which have the much greater impact of first-hand, individual views and style rather than emasculated summarisation.

II Quotation

A Some questions near the subject

From *Discussion Paper No 1, UN Asian Development Institute* (Report of an Expert Group Meeting, 9-13 December 1974, published June 1975, UNADI, PO Box 2-136, Bangkok, Thailand):

Dr P. Wignaraja (Institute Director)

'Should not the use of "barefoot" consultants who understand the new development objectives replace the "old" type of consultants and be the agents for the introduction of appropriate technology?

'What innovations are needed in rural institutions, which are required continuously to stay in touch with the people and also provide the right inputs at the right time?

'Since there is a need for systematising the approach to taking more "informed decisions" and "calculated guesses", how can a reporting system be designed with careful identification of only the essential information required?'

Amartya K. Sen

'The concentration on aggregative economics — reflecting the influence of important events of the thirties — has begun to weaken in recent years. For the developing countries the shift in the focus to technological and institutional "details" is long overdue.

'The intended focus on "integration" in the December meeting is okay, but one hopes it will not provide the excuse to gloss over detailed technological and institutional considerations, so often neglected in planning in its concern with macro-economics, or with multi-sectoral aggregative models. The most serious problems lie not in the "grand design" but in what has the superficial appearance of "details".'

Yusuf J. Ahmad (A nice thought)

'Many practitioners are unhappy about pilot projects which they regard as development models preconceived by foreign experts and imposed on an alien surrounding from outside. It is no wonder, in their opinion, that such projects are easily rejected by the social body in much the same way as an organ transplant is rejected.'

and 'It is essential, therefore, to take projects to the smallest administrative levels possible in order to ensure that the lowest income groups are involved. A second constraint on the size of projects lies in the fact that motivation and ability of individuals executing projects are critical to success, thus imposing a ceiling both to expansion and to replicability of initially small projects.'

A. Z. M. Obaidullah Khan (A vision)

'The vital elements in the development plan is the mobilisation and training of field workers. The village field worker must belong to the village whose development role should be part of his daily life. Then we can have trained paramedics, para-agronomists, nutrition workers at a higher, say, county level again coming from that area. What I am suggesting is a bottom-oriented consultative pattern of organisation of development services rather than a top-oriented compartmentalised scheme.'

Ian Little

'Who initiates? Who designs? Who implements? How far the farmer, and how far the agricultural department, development-authority, the consultant etc? Is it really correct that development activity always needs to be approached in an integrated manner, with effective co-ordination of the essential economic, social, political, technological and administrative elements, and the timing of the various actions?'

'Is this idea of a rationally concocted package, inevitably designed and imposed from above, right? Is it redeemed by adding "there would also need to be a great deal of involvement etc?" Can people get involved in something that is cut and dried?'

and 'I am asking "May not the project approach integrate what should essentially be a fragmented process?" Why should not a road here, a ditch there, a distribution of government land in one place, a scheme to consolidate in another, a change in relative prices in one country, more extension in another, etc be right? The end result should be "integrated"; but that does not imply that the approach — what is provided — should be.'

B From Paul Devitt (extracts from letter)

'Problems of a different order are diagnosed at different levels of the problem-solving structure. As I understand the origin of your proposed study of local diagnosis, it concerns the ineffectiveness of most of the present diagnostic methods to get to the roots of the practical difficulties faced by farmers and to prescribe real and durable cures for them. In many cases this may be because, in the absence of effective diagnostic and prescriptive procedures at the village or farmer grouping level, diagnosis has to be made at too high a level, whence it is often simply impossible to treat the specific ailments with specific remedies. And where diagnosis and prescription are undertaken at a high level the costs in terms of manpower are usually very high and cannot be sustained outside a project situation.

'High level diagnosis of low level problems tends to pre-empt local diagnostic capability. The pre-emptive effects of high level prescription and implementation have often been noted [Cf Little, above, "cut and dried"].

'Equally important is the time lag involved when diagnosis of farmers' problems is made at a level too remote from the farmers. It usually takes so long to investigate, diagnose, prescribe, and administer the remedy to perceived problems that the nature of the actual problems originally needing treatment may have changed in important respects. This is especially true of local social and institutional problems which tend to change more suddenly and unpredictably than technical problems.

'A further problem of diagnosis at a level remote from the farmers is that it becomes difficult to set up a sufficiently sensitive and direct means of communication between the farmers and the diagnostician to avoid psychological alienation of one from the other. The farmer readily falls into the role of 'patient', the passive object of the diagnostician's activity, and efforts to engage the participation of the farmers in a mutually consultative relationship are not easy to sustain.

'If the points above are more or less true, the primary diagnosis of farmers' problems should take place at a level as close to theirs as possible, and as far as possible by the farmers themselves. At this level not all problems can be diagnosed, and even fewer can be treated, and those which exceed the capacity

of the local diagnostician should be passed up to a higher and more technically competent level. In this way problems pass through a kind of screen at each ascending level and are also modified as they pass from one level to the next. The higher levels are inherently unable to produce effective and durable solutions to low level problems, and vice versa. An ideal structure might not only grade problems in the manner suggested by the screening metaphor, but would also interpret problems differently according to the perspective from each level. For example, a problem of low grain production may be seen as due to low prices at the village level, poor road communications at the provincial level, and of import tariffs at the national level. The diagnosis of the problem is therefore different at each level and so is the prescription for a remedy. But such a structure can only function effectively if each level is doing the work appropriate to it. Institutions at different levels should communicate and co-operate, but they cannot substitute for one another.

‘In most of Africa it is the local levels of diagnosis (and related activities) which are the weakest. Most of the energy which is mobilised from within and also from outside the majority of African countries is directed towards the higher administrative and executive levels. Like heat, energy in Africa seems to flow most naturally upwards, and it needs an immense countervailing force to get it flowing downwards again. In most places this force is simply not available. In practice this means that even though in some cases the energy to diagnose, prescribe and implement may be available at the higher levels of government, there is too little manpower, transport and perhaps determination to have a significant and durable effect on the rural scene as a whole. But there is obviously an enormous potential energy locked up and presumably frustrated among the farmers. Thinking in terms of energy for problem solving, and indeed for purposeful work, it must surely be true that in all African countries the vast proportion of it resides in the farmers themselves, and yet we hardly know how to liberate it.’

‘The main point of these observations is, I think, that although we and others like us, who are not peasant farmers ourselves, should seek all means to improve our diagnostic ability, we can never hope to achieve a situation, in any country, where all or even most diagnosis of farmers’ problems is provided by some kind of state service. In order that governments play their role in helping farmers with their problems it is, I believe, essential that farmers are encouraged and educated to play their role. These roles are complementary and non-substitutable.’

‘...In general it seems to me that in many parts of Africa local communities have lost, or are in the process of losing, the capacity to “think” as a group — that is to learn by trial and error and to apply their shared experience to their changing situation in a productive way. Thinking about practical agricultural problems tends to be done by individual farmers, who are often hampered by lack of knowledge of their economic environment and its potential, or by

officials and others (like us) at some remove from the scene of action. We need to help develop the means to enable farmers to think together to apply the solutions. I'm not suggesting that it used to be common for African farmers to solve their agricultural problems as a community, but the rate of change was less in days past and the options fewer. I think one of the reasons why agricultural co-operation is difficult to achieve is that although communities handled some judicial and political problems as a community, most economic problems were family matters; today a wider basis of co-operation in agricultural problem solving is needed.'

Editor's note

The last paragraph of this admirable contribution chimes in my mind with some remarks of H.S. Frankel: '... to recognise that different countries have a different language of social action; and possess, and indeed have long exercised, peculiar aptitudes for solving the problems of their own time and place; aptitudes which must be further developed in the historic setting of their own past to meet the exigencies of the present and the future.' (*The Economic Impact on Under-Developed Societies*, Oxford, Blackwell 1953. See also my own article, *ODI Review* No 2, 1974).

C From Dr N.S. Jodha (extract from letter)

'This brings me to the real problem of how to do diagnosis and programming, or more precisely who should do it. At present the diagnosis (whether it could or could not form the actual basis of local programme and administrative action is a different thing) is generally done in the following ways:

- (a) ad hoc research studies by universities and other organisations;
- (b) feasibility and evaluation type of work for specific areas or problems done by research consultants on behalf of the programme sponsoring agencies;
- (c) pooling of area-level data with explanatory notes prepared on ad hoc basis by block- or district-level people on receiving instructions from higher authorities.

'As you already know, studies of type (a) are so numerous and yet seldom used by policy makers unless there is good rapport between the research operator and policy makers. Moreover, diagnosis in many of these studies is rarely designed so as to form the actual basis of the local programme. The indifference of academic researchers to real issues make many of these studies operationally irrelevant.

'The diagnosis provided by category (c) is evident in a number of master plans, resource inventory surveys and various district reports prepared for different purposes. One could get details of all sorts ranging from soil types and water tables to land holding size and important festivals in the area. If one looks at them from the viewpoint of project reports, they mostly do not appear more than detailed shopping lists. For example, some of the reports presented to the

World Bank to facilitate pre-investment appraisal of the situation in connection with assistance for 'drought-proofing' of drought-prone areas (six districts) had to be revised or rewritten several times before they could give a meaningful idea of the situation.

'I find it very difficult to agree with any proposal which as a rule makes a block level (or in some cases district level) administrative system responsible for making an operationally meaningful diagnosis and then establishing local programming. The reason is that unless thoroughly trained or their perception is changed they find it difficult to conceive of anything called diagnosis or local programming as you understand them. They can definitely complement the work by others but on their own they may prove inadequate.

'Moreover, differences in human potential within a community are not unique features of rural communities alone. Those who earn their bread in the name of farmer (as agricultural administrator, extension worker or researcher) vary so greatly in their perception that the same thing is judged and understood quite differently by different groups. The differences (in terms of depth) so clearly visible in the project proposals and progress reports about Lead Banks, SFDA, DPAP, etc, from different districts despite uniform central guidance clearly illustrates the point.

'Probably, faced with the limitations of methods of diagnosis covered under (a) and (c) mentioned above, more and more project operators are resorting to diagnosis (and in some cases local programming) through technical consultants [category (b)]. Partly in response to the increased demand, numerous consultancy shops have been established in recent years. They are prepared (if not equipped) to undertake any problem for study ranging from loitering habits of public school boys to economic feasibility of Gobar gas plants. Consultancy has become a real commercial proposition and some of the academically respectable institutions (partly to sustain their relevance and partly to meet financial crises) have joined what is no longer a select list of consultants. Some of the organisations have a good complement consisting of different subject matter specialists ranging from geologists to anthropologists. Some of them seem to be doing a good job in terms of producing often quoted reports also. But one limitation I have noticed in several cases is that diagnosis is fairly good as far as the agro-biological-physical parameters of the situation are concerned. The moment it comes to the human factor — which is most crucial as far as the operation of changeable agro-biological physical variables are concerned — many of the consultants start faltering. They resort to data collection through the people who neither have ample perspective nor time to do an adequate job of understanding the system. Computerised quantitative results supplemented by neatly written tour impressions constitute their reports. Having earned their consultancy fee they have no stake in the project. If their suggested programme fails to work they are not answerable. On the contrary they may ask for another consultancy on why the project failed. The programme operators partly to save their skin may agree to a second round of consultancy. In the process only consultancy shops gain. One way of improving the situation

is to associate the consultants with the follow-up action and make them at least partly responsible for the consequences of their recommendations. This may sound harsh but this seems to be the only way of making consultancy more realistic, responsible and purposeful.

'I have also to make a few comments about the two most frequently mentioned points, namely:

- (1) discussions with farmers; and
- (2) local programming for local agricultural development.

'If by discussions with farmers we mean formation of our objective judgements about the situation after closely observing and understanding the field level situation, I have nothing to say against it. However, if the point of "discussions" with farmers is taken up literally, which is quite likely in view of continued repetition of the slogan, it may have several undesirable consequences. I will explain the point simply by giving a few illustrations:

- (a) One way of "discussion with farmers" is conducting an "opinion survey" as has been done by several research institutions including agro-economic research centres, NICD, etc. With such an approach the opinions of farmer (ie answers casually given by farmers to pestering investigators) about Panchayat Raj, CD programmes, co-operatives etc, never matched with the actual performance of the farmer *vis-à-vis* the programme, about which he gave opinions. Such results may help producing bulk reports — describing numbers in words, or may make headlines in the inside pages of newspapers, but they hardly help in diagnosing the situation.

This is because what a farmer tells may differ from what he feels, what he tells may differ from what he means, and what he means or understands (and tells) may differ from the objective realities of the situation. Moreover, whatever a farmer may reply is quite often a function of both the form and style of question as well as who, in whose presence, is asking the questions.

- (b) Another method normally adopted by specially appointed fact finding commissions etc, to elicit farmers' views is to call the farmers to furnish their opinions or interview farmers within their villages. Anybody who knows rural India, knows beforehand what category of farmers will come forward or will be brought forward by block or revenue officials to give views and what will be the class bias of these views. Moreover, despite awakening or politicisation of rural areas in parts of the country, my latest experience suggests that the small man for reasons of lack of trust in outsiders, etc, still gives (if he gives at all) his views after consulting the village influentials. Many of the small people do not give interviews to investigators unless the investigators have first interviewed the big ones in the village.

'Thus in the ultimate analysis, "discussions with farmers" would mean discussions with influential or "better-off farmers", because this is the group through

which most of the researchers, politicians and administrators normally know the "rural situation". How far the goal of rural development for rural poor could be achieved through local planning based on the views of only those who can express views is anybody's guess.

'Of course rural rich can plead for rural poor if it directly or indirectly serves the former's interests. They may (they actually did) recommend house-sites for the rural poor because by providing these landlords will get compensation for a plot on which rural poor are already living and who cannot be ejected; they may plead for liberal institutional loans to the poor because it will help recovery of the rich man's old loans to the poor; they may plead for an employment guarantee scheme because it may ensure leakages for the rich. One may multiply the examples if required.'

Editor's note

The two long extracts above are full of meat, and range fairly widely. They are supplemented below by some shorter quotations and references under slightly narrower subject headings. These have been very roughly divided into those who emphasise the need for skill, and research, and imagination, and who doubt the ability of the local field bureaucracy to provide them (School 1); and those who emphasise involvement, with retraining, of the local staff and the onus on farmers (School 2 and Sub-school 3). Note, a slight ambiguity in the word 'implementers', meaning (1) those who implement programmes locally as junior officials, *or* (2) the farmers who actually do the farm production. This is the shadowy line between School 2 and Sub-school 3.

Note also that the emphasis on skill tends to go with those commentators who tend to emphasise 'survey', and 'planning' in diagnosis and to de-emphasise the less formal 'operational reconnaissance' and 'programming' element.

D The need for skill (partly School 1)

From Leonard Joy (extract from letter)

'I think ultimately the answer is that one has to do it in the way that you say by listening to farmers; I would say, in addition, by thinking it through with the farmers. I remember a particularly instructive two days with senior extension officers in Bengal where first of all a farmer explained what he did, day by day through the cropping calendar, and then the extension officer told him what he should be doing and we then tried to work this out day by day through the cropping calendar. In this process it became absolutely clear that the farmer could not sensibly do what he was being advised. This was, of course, because of timing constraints. In other situations, however, considerations of uncertainty would be brought out, or perhaps problems of access to resources and so on. Again, what I think is required is case study examples of how you actually go about doing the job in particular situations. These will have to demonstrate how you choose the class of farmers that you are concerned with; how you listen to them in order to get ideas about what is relevant to improving their farming situation; how you propose specific

measures — new seed, fertiliser and cultivation practices, credit, marketing and so on; how you examine what difference this will make to them and how they might initially, at least, change their behaviour; how you assess what the impact of the measures will be on other classes of farmers, and perhaps on landless labourers, on marketed surplus and so on, and how you move from there to the design and implementation of specific operations.

‘You will see that in all these cases, my own tendency is to try to demonstrate how one actually does things in particular situations. I think what one wants to do, ideally, is to have “a thinking man” convening a team of “practical men” tackling practical problems and thinking through with them their approach and the implications of their experience.’

From Michael Collinson (extract from letter)

‘I must just enter a plea with you not to dismiss the need for detailed investigation work too lightly (your comment on my book on page 9). I should like to make three points and then outline why I see a need for fairly full investigation. First the three points:

- (1) Methodologically there are possibilities — in at least some farming systems — for data collection techniques that reduce the manpower and money requirements of full, formal surveys. Some evidence is evaluated in chapter 14 of my book.
- (2) When one looks at the survey preparation and design/appraisal and negotiation sequence presently followed on IBRD projects reaching only 2,000 or 3,000 farmers which can take well over 18 months — there may be time to do full surveys for rural development planning. I have designed, supervised collection and tabulation, and analysed seven farm surveys in the course of project planning in various contexts, each survey taking between one and two months.’

Editor’s note

The further sections of this letter lead to an important proposition that, since field staff, to give proper individual supervision/advice, could not effectively cover more than 20/25 farms (an impossible ratio), reliance *must* be placed on diffusion of profitable innovations between farmers themselves. To invent, test, and put forward such innovations requires the skilled, though quick (two month) survey suggested above. This combination (skill-diffusion) is a mixture of School 1 and Sub-school 3; presumably puts local field staff in a mainly servicing (not diagnosing) level; and does not specify organisation of farmers for diffusion, though presumably includes it where suitable.

K. Pickering

Pickering emphasises that, in certain situations, technological considerations, which are quite complex (combination of anti-erosion measures combined with income-maintenance in this case) may be decisive in diagnosis.

E The need for research

From Q. B. O. Anthonio (extracts)

'It is without question that diagnosis has to precede agricultural programmes. Unfortunately when this is done, it is often carried out only haphazardly and sometimes not at all because the experts "know it all". In most cases, the issues are started as to pre-empt diagnosis and only the results or conclusions arrived at by "experts" are of interest (at least until recently) and no one takes the trouble to analyse, much less diagnose. In some cases, the problems are not even stated with any clear objective for diagnosis.

'More often than not, the more appealing and exciting part of most programmes is "recommendation for development", because governments, research workers and even "experts" are always *eager to show* that something is being done. With this occupation, there is little time devoted or considered worthwhile to *first* build up a body of basic information and knowledge about the problems, the people, the area, and the interrelationship of the array of systems involved to develop agriculture. Farmers are rarely if ever consulted. *Secondly*, we've neglected the need for a solid base of continuing research and experienced personnel; the type of research; who to do what; training for identifying and analysing the appropriate questions; financial and other inducement for keeping good staff on the job long and consistent enough to focus on national priorities. Well, where will the answers come from? In the past we relied heavily if not solely on books, published papers, suppositions and assumptions that are hurriedly (sometimes less so) put together largely to get another "brilliant" but non-operational publication. We are more textbook-tradition bound than ever before!'

On realism: 'The fault I think is not really a question of planning "top-down", but that planning is deficient and misleading. Reversing the order "bottom-up" is not, to my experience, necessarily going to bridge the gap. What is needed for both "top-down" and "bottom-up" planning is an efficient research body to handle the question of continuing assembly and analysis of vital agro-economic and social information for planning, coupled with relevant training and further research.'

and '... In a nutshell, I am saying that we know very little about how things are done and are changing in agriculture and the economy. Unfortunately, instead of finding out the how, and why, we are trying to find answers to undefined problems and this preoccupation pre-empted attention from the key problem of establishing a body of well trained personnel and useful research institutions that will be ready to face the task of the future in providing answers for the development "take-off" phase.'

From J. E. Bessell

'Some developing countries depend on expatriate farm management personnel for the nucleus of their farm extension research services. Most of the contracts for expatriate personnel are short-term (up to three years) and usually only

attract those who are newly graduated. Consequently, such personnel find themselves in a difficult situation due to:

- (a) a lack of trained supervision for their own research,
- (b) a lack of experience in research design, and
- (c) a lack of knowledge of local conditions.

'The first year of the contract is spent in becoming familiar with local conditions; the second, in collecting information based on inadequate research design while the third is spent incompetently analysing data and attempting to write their report. Young nationals of a country sufficiently developed to maintain their extension research services without expatriates still find themselves in a similar situation. One way of overcoming this waste of time, money and people is to appoint a controller who would be responsible for research design and subsequent analysis of a team of young research workers.'

F Local staff problems

Apart from the remarks in N.S. Jodha (above) several authors stress the difficulty of heavy reliance on local field staff, eg:

From K. Davey (extract)

'Secondly who should carry out area diagnosis, etc? The very flexible and responsive attitudes for which you rightly call, need great self-confidence. There is security for the extension staff in the preconceived, packaged "wisdom" received from on high, however wrong-headed it may be. One has to be confident of one's professional ability and tenure to listen as well as utter.'

From John Harriss (extract)

'The basic proposition as it is set out on page 2 is not helpful: presumably what is intended is to establish guidelines on how diagnosis can most usefully be carried out, including ways in which to group and organise the staff that will be required. Particular emphasis is given to the need to consult with villagers; but if the diagnoses are to be other than "one-off jobs" this will mean mobilising villagers on a continuous basis. Indeed approaches both to "diagnosis" and to "co-ordination" seem to hinge around the role of the people themselves: are they involved actively or not? Without the element of involvement the approach to diagnosis that is suggested seems rather "static".'

From Q.B.O. Anthonio

'In most developing countries, priority is on individual progress and promotion. Hence, the individual, as to be expected, opts for the line of least resistance with the consequent neglect of the major time and labour intensive surveys required.'

Editor's note

In addition, K.A.P. Stevenson and Don Winkelman raise questions on the motivation, competence, and constant transfers (also R. Chambers) of local

field staff. There are also political dangers where staff and local magnates get together, as many correspondents point out.

G The need for participation of implementers (mainly Schools 2 and 3)

The Paul Devitt extract, emphasising the *type* of contribution which can come from different levels (eg village—district—centre) is a salutary warning against generalisation. But the final weight of his thought emphasises the psychological gap ‘officials—farmers’ and what might be called ‘assisted self-adjustment to change’ by farming communities.

From R.C. Chambers (extracts)

‘Is it necessary, in any one situation, to have a preliminary *idea* of what sorts of diagnoses and prescriptions can be acted on? In one place, the choice might be limited to varieties of one crop, or more generally cultural practices. In another there might be a chance of influencing agricultural research. In another, ploughing or water lift technology might provide an opportunity (eg if there was an intermediate technology development centre within range). This raises the question whether there are different levels of planning — shorter-term specific planning (crop varieties etc), and longer-term strategic planning (developing new technologies altogether, changing land use, and so on). Perhaps in practice it will be necessary to decide which of these one is primarily or exclusively concerned with. Local-level staff could work on the first; but probably not on the second.’

‘Finally, with diagnosis again, the idea of sequence. Let staff start on the simplest/safest thing (as in CD theory), and gradually build up confidence and competence over the years. Let the first thing also be quick-acting, so that they see results. How does this narrow the choice of prescriptions in practice?’

‘Old chestnut. Continuity of staff in field posts may be a *necessary* precondition for good work in diagnosis and implementation *by them*.’

Editor’s note

On the first of these quotations from Chambers, compare Ian Little (UNADI quoted above).

A note rather on the same lines about interviews based only on essentials comes from Gilbert Etienne:

‘Interviews should not be too long or too complicated. Particular attention should be given to crucial issues only, technical and economic, to emphasise cash expenditures for agriculture and return in cash from sales, in order to see if the farmer is viable or not, enjoys some net cash income. It is safer to have less but good interviews than masses of unreliable data collected by people not interested in such studies!’

H The need for continuity

(See also John Harriss above)

From N. S. Carey Jones (extract from letter)

'There seems to be a suggestion here that by taking an inventory, as it were, one will come up with answers to the question "what to do?" in any area. This seems too static (and the diagnosis could be endless — a mass of information would be needed). The local technical and human potential will respond and react to some extent to the opportunities that are made available to it and so will change. (Even the word "diagnosis" suggests some malady that can be cured if its cause can be discovered.)'

From Dr Eduardo Virone (oral communication)

To avoid both the 'static' effect of 'one-off' surveys (Harriss) and to cover the observation (Carey Jones) that farmers react to change and new opportunities, Dr Virone has suggested that an extension adviser should not only be learning about an area but, simultaneously, suggesting improvements, even though minor, so that farmer confidence grows steadily as the advice proves useful. Survey, informed discussions with farmers, and suggestions to them should run alongside each other.

Differences within the rural community and between communities

Finally, several correspondents (Biggs, Carey Jones, Harriss, Collinson, Joy and others) emphasised both the different situations and interests within the farming community (large, small, marginal, landless 'farmers'), political tensions between them, differences between neighbouring communities (eg population characteristics, water supply (Harriss), and cultural differences (tribes, areas) which may alter responses. This point emphasises the need for local assessment, and sensitivity, though it makes no judgement between highly trained and junior staff.

III Comment, application

(Editor)

Comment

It is encouraging that there is such considerable overlap in the foregoing quotations, although each author makes his points in his own way; for this implies a good deal of independently-reached consensus. But the consensus is not mainly a consensus about *policies*, it is a consensus about difficulties and even failures. Perhaps in this concluding note we could search for policy-applications, steering between the Scylla of sole reliance on experts and the Charybdis of hopeful reliance on unaided farmers.

Of the *need for expertise* there can be no doubt. Someone with adequate agronomic, or ecological, or engineering knowledge must look at the physical potential of an area; and someone with economic training must assess feasibility and profitability of a suggested programme. Further, we must not under-

emphasise the need for a sense of security, the need for imagination, and the need for at least some detachment from local political pressures, all of which are often hard to find, for obvious and not discreditable reasons, among junior local staff.

Alongside this must be put the *advantages of stressing local staff and local farmers*: (1) experts visit, but local staff (should!) stay and provide some continuity; (2) economy in personnel/time; (3) non-pre-emption by higher level decisions; (4) less psychological alienation with junior staff, none at all if farmers themselves are finding their own solutions, though with help (not instruction!).

Devitt, and perhaps Chambers, suggest some positive view of this dilemma, Devitt in suggesting a division of levels at which different types of decision are made, each level having a unique, non-substitutable contribution to make. Chambers suggests a 'short-term—longer-term' division as between local and higher decisions, although he would probably not consider this the only division.

This type of answer may also help to avoid difficulties in the 'barefoot versus expert' controversy. Barefoot economists, sociologists, engineers may be there to make fairly immediate and obvious comments and suggestions, experts to deal with more difficult, *possibly* longer-term decisions.

A further suggestion, in the same attempt to accept *both* the arguments, may be to use experts for sampling situations within a crop-ecological zone (though the human, cultural and political ecology will also need care). While junior staff, barefoots, and the farmers themselves will have to fill in the idiosyncratic details of each part of the (superficially) similar zone.

A good deal more attention will have to be paid to the simplification and careful sighting of questions asked of farmers, so that they are: (1) relevant to programme design; (2) minimal in numbers for the purpose intended, ie a local *programme*, which may here be distinguished from a less local *plan*. The questions for a two-month farm-management sampling survey will, in this context, be far more numerous and skilful than the minimal questions for *all* local areas.

On *consultancy*, Jodha has covered a great number of the needed warnings.

Research may seem to be out of place here. It is included in this note because current programming *may* be tempted to rely too much on earlier, badly sighted surveys; and because many projects start by initiating 'research' of the types which Jodha, Bessell, and Anthonio, each in a slightly differing but mainly supportive way, so strongly condemn. There is little doubt that fundamental rethinking and redesign of operational agricultural research is urgently needed.

Application

Is it possible now to move towards positive recommendations, arising from this analysis? The shape of organisation and division of function which emerges (in my view) from the above argument would go somewhat like this:

(1) In a given crop-ecological zone there is a need for at least a sample area, both technically and socially as representative as possible, to be professionally studied, from about four points of view – crop and/or animal potential; farm-management analysis; engineering/investment possibilities; social/political structure and functioning. Omitting expatriates, this would seem to be a function which could be fulfilled, in varying proportions according to circumstances, from a university with a strong agricultural component; from a research station with a strong farm-system component; from government staff (eg agronomist, engineer, probably from at least district and possibly higher level); or from a ‘planning-research’ staff at district or above, where such an organisation exists. This sample study would be not unlike a pre-project study where it is properly done, fitted in, as Collinson says, during the negotiating period of an externally financed project. Such a study would use any *useful* material from previous studies (eg soil survey, if it exists).

(2) For any given area in the zone (of about ‘block’ size, eg 10x12 square miles), preliminary survey and consultation would be at junior field staff level *plus* stimulation of farmer discussion, in any appropriate grouping, emphatically including small farmers. One major point would be to spot how the area *differs* from the results of the deeper sample survey. Points too difficult for this local team to solve would need assistance from higher levels.

(3) Field staff, in consultation with district, and with any district planning staff which may exist, would then join in the decision on a tentative programme, and would be responsible for continuity in close touch with farmers, and for feed-back and modification over time.

(4) It is not altogether clear where the ‘barefoots’ fit into this. The word might mean: (a) men or women trained originally in a discipline, who have a strong operational rather than academic bias, built up increasingly by field experience; or (b) the brighter members of junior field staff, given extra training in the elements of farm-management, or in the ways by which to obtain minimum essential information. It is perhaps important that ‘barefoot’ should not remain a vague expression designed to fill a need for a man who is a *combination* of Joy’s ‘thinking man and practical man’, and at the same time thick on the ground and very modestly paid. Such animals, outside occasional voluntary organisations or young, often expatriate, graduates eager for practical field experience, are in fact rare. The ‘barefoot economist’ or agronomist or engineer is *more probably two men* – a retrained junior field man with access, for advice and supervision, to an experienced professional.

Policy implications

The following points, in total, look rather numerous and formidable. In fact, some governments already cover some parts of them, and in any case no administration would tackle all simultaneously.

(a) Staff for (say) district-level¹ proper (sample) survey

In most countries, there is a weakness here. The main operational field staff (eg District Agricultural Officer) have not the time for such detailed work, although they should always be consulted in it. Some resource of fairly mobile staff could be built up:

- (1) in agricultural universities, or faculties, or 'agro-economic research centres' (India);
- (2) in major agricultural research organisations, by developing a strong farm systems unit (especially economic and sociological) alongside the exact scientists. Such a unit would have a sandwich job – partly in research and partly in field survey and consultancy working with the operational government officers;
- (3) as a mainly operational diagnostic and consultative team within the administrative unit at district level, closely linked to a district planning organisation, where it exists. I (personally) would strongly stress that such a team should be directly under the administration, not under a non-operational 'Ministry of Planning' at the centre.

The *recommendation* here is that, whatever the choice of administrative placing of such a team, the whole training and attitude towards operational research *needs radical revision*, to avoid the obvious failures pointed out by Anthonio, Bessell, Jodha, most of which spring from the mechanical academic tradition, over-reliance on 'enumerators' and statistics, PhD work, etc. The link with operational and administrative needs, whether between a research centre, a university department, or even an agro-economic centre, needs to be far more strongly stressed; probably young men should be recruited to any of these centres *after* at least five years' practical field experience within the government field staff.

(b) At the field level

The most obvious needs are:

- (1) revision of field-staff management (Belshaw/Chambers work in Kenya);
- (2) altered training for junior field staff, especially in the capacity to listen to farmers; in whatever can be taught about ways to stimulate farmer organisation; and in how to ask minimal useful questions, and what those minimal questions are likely to be. Elements (only) of farm management principles should be in every such course, if necessary to exclusion of some technical detail taught in so many training courses for junior extension staff, most of which is forgotten three months later, and would need reference to a fully trained agronomist in any case.

1 District might be province or region in some countries. I am using Indian language – ie a district covering about 1-1½ million population.

(c) Further changes

The other changes, mainly concerned with the planning function, go beyond this chapter to a subsequent paper on Planning.

Final comment

I am constantly worried, as pages of detailed consideration of relationships and functions mount up, that our joint endeavour to refine thinking, to seek the detailed concepts behind 'consultation' or 'barefoots', will reach some razor-edge distinctions, pitfalls on either side, on which no real-life government policy can hope to balance. Administration is always a rough-and-ready compromise, constrained by expense, the quality of personnel, the need for simple, administrable rules and disciplines; are we in fact demanding far too high a degree of exactitude from a blunt instrument?

The only grains of comfort are:

- (1) those who give advice had better think through, to the last inch, what they mean by the glib phrases they use, before they use them;
- (2) those who *do*, rather than advise, had better know the pitfalls, even where they cannot altogether avoid them;
- (3) the remarks of Amartya K. Sen (p16), that 'the most serious problems lie not in the "grand design" but in what has the superficial appearance of "details"', and 'the focus on technological and institutional "details" is long overdue'.
- (4) finally, in the fact that each country administration faces different problems, has already advanced far in one direction, yet may gain from analyses in another; and that while wholesale reform will never happen all at once, some *path* towards a more effective system can perhaps be followed over the years. Goodness knows, the mobilisation of a peasant economy is not to be done in a day or even a decade; and although we still face a daunting level of failure, comparing 1950 with 1975 there are, here and there, highly significant elements of success in this, perhaps both the most difficult and the most important field of development.

Envoi

(Courtesy, Stephen Sandford)

An answer from a farmer who was consulted:

'These are my sheep. They are not the concern of Government but my concern. Whether they live or die is of no importance to anyone but me; and even with me if they die I shall still live.' (From 'A study of Farm and Livestock Systems in the Central Highlands of Ethiopia', prepared by Noel J. Cossins and Bekele Yemerou for the Provisional Military Government (Livestock and Meat Board), 1974.)

Respondents quoted in Chapter 3

Mr Yusuf J. Ahmad: OECD Development Centre, 94 rue Chardon-Lagache, 705016 Paris Cedex, France

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Chapter 4: Farmer and Community Groups

Guy Hunter and Janice Jiggins

I Introduction

There has been much written, over many years, about groups of farmers or of farming communities – about the need for them for administrative purposes, about the value of them for mobilising effort and initiative, or for expressing aspirations, or for giving reality to democratic principles. Such groups include co-operatives, farmer associations, irrigation groups, traditional and new credit or savings groups, development committees, *panchayats*, brigades and teams, self-help groups, *ujamaa* and other communal groups, and many more. One has only to look at this list to see how different they are in type, in the connection within which they arise or are formed, in function, and in main objective.

For they include single-purpose and multi-purpose groups, traditional and modernising groups, self-managed, half self-managed, and totally externally-managed groups, ideologically inspired or pure productivity groups, groups continuously active or only intermittently appearing for special functions, groups structured in tiers and hierarchies or individual and self-sufficient, groups organically linked to single technologies, and groups with wide, semi-governmental purposes.

Little has been done, at least in the context of agricultural development, to analyse and categorise this diversity of groupings, which has little in common but multiple membership and a rural context, and particularly to categorise them in ways which might be useful in design and administration of rural development.

This chapter is a modest attempt to start such analysis and categorisation, illustrated from field experience and drawing upon the work of many scholars and the evidence of many field reports on projects and on semi-spontaneous development. It will benefit greatly from both criticism and further illustration.

Because it is about groups, it does not imply that groups should be formed or encouraged in every situation, as it were ‘for their own sake’. Nor does it intend to lead to any one orthodoxy or solution about ‘the best’ type of group. On the contrary, the emphasis is on diversity.

Certain common themes will underly most of this chapter. First we start from an assumption that governments wish to institute *change* (‘development’, ‘modernisation’, ‘productivity’, whatever). Second, that there is a constant tug of war between the desire for security and the desire to grasp opportunity. Third, we must take into account a spontaneous (ie non-governmental) entrepreneurial element which may show itself in society at any time.

Finally, since we are dealing with multiple factors, the main divisions of subject matter below are not mutually exclusive, because they do not lie on the same plane; they are more like cross-sections cut through a single rod vertically,

horizontally, and at intermediate angles, showing different shapes and, perhaps, different elements of texture. It will be necessary, therefore, to make a single, co-ordinated set of conclusions at the end.

II Cross-sections

A Traditional attitudes and groups

It may be as well to start at the early point of what is in some ways a transition through time, remembering that traditional attitudes, even only as trace-elements, may persist, and even flare up again, long after the dominance of a traditional way of life has given way; remembering also that we are perforce in the twentieth century — long after the heyday of isolated and ‘pure’ traditional societies.

1 Survival for all: fear of change

One quite common factor in traditional societies, whether in Africa or Asia, is that the culture decrees that *all* members have a right to survival. So, if some have land and some no land, the latter will be assigned (or assign to themselves) some service function (including warrior status for men) for which food is provided. The Indian *jajmani* system, in which village servants¹ * are paid, perhaps annually, in grain, is a classical example; anthropologists could provide dozens more. The fear of losing through change this right to survival for all members is splendidly illustrated from *Behind Mud Walls*:²

‘But this we do know: the old order has served us well for centuries. It has provided a task for everyone who is born into it. And it has provided for the carrying-out of every task needed for village self-sufficiency, by men trained from childhood. If change once begins, how far will it go?’

Modern agricultural development proposals (outside countries with a fully communalist policy, eg *ujamaa* in Tanzania, or the pattern in Mainland China) tend to offer a ‘package’ to *individuals*, although they may suggest group action for securing credit, inputs, or marketing. They may also tend to criticise what they call dependency (eg of smallholders, sharecroppers, tenants on large farms, or, at the extreme, bonded labour). But in doing so they may raise in many minds a gnawing fear that, while luckier individuals may benefit, the less well-placed and the service dependants will lose the social security of a system in which rights and duties are prescribed in a way that all survive — however meagrely. Davy³ writes of members of traditional societies in West Africa ‘investing in social relationships rather than in capital goods, equipment or land’ as a form of social insurance against bad times. Scarlett Epstein⁴ has emphasised the same point from Indian studies, stressing the climatic uncertainty which constitutes risk, and the social regulation (eg caste) which may pin individuals in service or other activities which exclude them from a share in profitable agricultural packages. Many other observers have helped to explain apparently extravagant social expenditure, often leading to indebtedness, by the same

* References at end of chapter, pages 54, 55, 56.

desire for social insurance. An unusual and striking example where the tension between traditional, though limited security, and non-traditional individual opportunity is actually institutionalised comes from Fiji, where there is a special name for members of society who deliberately elect to contract out of communal social obligations (eg unpaid village communal chores), and thereby relinquish all claims to communal support – they become ‘go-it-aloners’, for better and for worse.⁵

Many authors have observed that the transition from mainly subsistence to more market-oriented production is seen as a security risk. Wharton⁶ has noted faster adoption of improved strains of reliable indigenous varieties as against HYVs, despite the latter’s higher potential; Knight’s study⁷ of the Nyiha in Mbozi (Tanzania) stresses the additional dependence on uncontrolled external factors which accompanies a move to cash cropping.

Moreover, a traditional system may be valued and loved. Some hill peoples of Assam⁸ regard it as shameful to sell food – food which is a necessity of life and must be (and is) shared freely, in times of shortage, by those who have with those who have not. They resist ‘packages’ aimed at producing and selling surpluses of staple foods. Again, Turnbull⁹ from Africa:

‘We no longer have any reason for living, because we have been forced away from the way of our ancestors, and we lead other men’s lives, not the lives of our fathers.’

A very similar outburst is quoted by Gaitskell from the Gezira scheme:¹⁰

‘We hate these straight lines, we would rather be hungry once every few years, with freedom to range with our cattle unconfined, than have full bellies and be fined if we stray outside these horrid little squares.’

These values and emotional attachment (no pejorative implication – emotion is a ‘reason for living’) are one side of the tension, to which the more obvious fear of servants, share-croppers, tenants etc must be added. Indeed, as a correspondent points out, the ‘loving and valuing’ may be a form of expression of interests of particular groups in their particular circumstances.

It may be that group formation helps to allay those fears: ‘there is safety in numbers’; more than safety perhaps, emotional comfort:¹¹

‘But we need the strength of the family to support us. We do not trust the outside world, and we are suspicious of each other. Our lives are oppressed by mean fears. We fear the rent collector, we fear the police watchman, we fear everyone who looks as though he might claim some authority over us; we fear our creditors, we fear our patrons, we fear too much rain, we fear locusts, we fear thieves, we fear the evil spirits which threaten our children and our animals, and we fear the strength of our neighbour.’

The conclusion from this would be that group formation in societies where tradition and risk-aversion is strong should seek for, and stress, the added *security* of group action; further, it may be unwise to let fall criticisms of what

may seem an unjust or unprogressive social pattern, or to urge 'liberation' from it, unless positive methods of liberation are *near and sure*, and also include a substitute for the security which the old system offered to weaker members.¹²

2 Existing traditional groupings¹³

Traditional groups for common action often have: (1) a very specific structure, eg an age-set, a sub-clan; they almost invariably have (2) a specific function – house-building, path-clearing; and they are often not continuous but intermittent, coming together when the particular task arises. It has almost always proved difficult to change either their composition or their function, or to use them as a continuously active group for agricultural development. There are, however, some groups which have a 'modern' function and are continuous, among which could be included credit /savings societies, chit clubs (India), *esusu* societies (West Africa), a variety of (often church-related) social security groups (Ethiopia), such as funeral clubs. These can indeed be harnessed for rural development, in a wider sense, and can sometimes extend their range of action.¹⁴ Many externally planned projects (eg CADU in Ethiopia) have overlooked this tissue of social action, or consciously dismissed it as irrelevant to modernisation. At the opposite pole, such projects have also tried to use the more structured and intermittent groups for different and continuous functions. On the whole, traditional groups tend to be concerned with *social* rather than agro-economic functions (cf Paul Devitt, in Chapter 3). One reason may be that certain social achievements (building a school or a protected water supply) seem far simpler to achieve and to meet a direct need, as against programmes of agricultural improvement, which are harder to understand, involve risk, and (alas) have so often been seen by villagers to fail or to increase the work-load without a proportionate income gain.¹⁵

On the whole, we would be inclined to think that: (a) extension or project staff should be well aware of what groups exist, with what structure, for what purpose; (b) with a very few exceptions, of which savings groups may be one, traditional common action groups are not *easily* harnessed for anything but their traditional function and certainly not easily transformed into formal co-operatives; but they may be nudged into a new direction; (c) some of the most successful modernising groups (discussed later), may be spontaneously formed but are not traditional. Co-operatives are usually neither spontaneous nor traditional.¹⁶

B Total communalism¹⁷ or multiple function groups

Starting, as we have, from traditional groupings, we have strongly emphasised specific functions for which groups, usually only part of a whole community, may be formed. There is, however, the alternative approach, of which Mainland China and Tanzania are usually quoted as examples, in which to a greater or lesser extent all land is regarded as for common use by local communities, all incomes accruing from it are shared, and the local community is regarded as a single group (*ujamaa*) or a group in a hierarchy of functional groups (team, brigade, commune). The word 'all' must be qualified in China by the small

household plot, and by exceptions, both local and national, in Tanzania where areas of land have not been included in the *ujamaa* common area.

These total solutions involve total land reform and pooling of holdings, and thus cut the various knots of fragmented holdings, unequal potential in different local plots (the 'spottiness' of natural resources), and various forms of private dependency (tenancy, share-cropping, etc).¹⁸ They also greatly facilitate technology (tractorisation, new irrigation layouts, pest-control, and various economies of scale). Certainly in China, they also facilitate agricultural planning (since cropping areas can be decided from above), and also incomes policy (since criteria for income distribution from common effort can be used to give varying income levels for work and to distribute part of the total to the aged, children, other dependants, taxes and development finance). Tanzania has not gone so far in either planning or economic control. Indeed, in many areas there still appear to be tensions, familiar from Russian and other communalist experience, between earnings from the private plot and work on the common plot for a share of the common product. Further, it does not seem that the same degree of close direction and supervision is given to the *ujamaa* villages, nor the same planning of local investment and supplies of inputs.

This chapter is not concerned to argue for or against major political solutions of the communalist type. At this point only a few comments are needed. First, whether in China or Tanzania, the communal solution is *not* traditional — quite the reverse; if the Chinese system is sustained for another generation, common work and regulated income distribution may become a 'tradition', which will need detailed studies which cannot yet be made. Second, a half-way solution in Tanzania is proving very difficult. Goran Hyden¹⁹ has recently pointed to the stresses which can arise from the contrast in rewards between, say, the mechanic employed within the commercial economy of Tanzania and the rewards offered to the mechanic as an equal share, based on work hours, with all the other labourers (for they are not exactly farmers) on the common plot. It would certainly seem that, in the Tanzania case, *ujamaa agriculture* may work well for a bit: but that as the economy becomes more monetised and less subsistence, and as division of labour increases (more clerks, drivers, technicians, co-operative managers, craftsmen, etc), so an *ujamaa economy* will be harder to hold together: in a word, economic and developmental success might either swamp the *ujamaa* group or require a full-scale Maoist revolution in the main national economy. Thirdly, it can be observed that millennial propaganda in societies which have not had a major revolution, and in the absence of any enforceable plan for the use and distribution of resources, is likely to add to, rather than alleviate, rural frustration: it is the peasants who suffer most from premature and ineffective movements of this kind.

C Groups in a gradualist system

We may put aside temporarily full communalist systems and consider the variety of groups in gradualist systems, ie those in which rural people have not been compulsorily organised into fixed patterns for most main purposes and

where a great variety of groups may exist, formed spontaneously or by persuasion, inducement, or more or less indirect pressure.

1 Some distinctions

It is at once necessary to define 'groups' more closely: it is a vague word, deliberately used in the title of this chapter, since we have assumed a need for some form of grouping for administrative convenience or for corporate expression of needs and desires, or for democratic management. Categories are necessary because it is clear that the origin, size, structure, functions and purposes of a 'group' profoundly affect its style of behaviour and its relevance for different functions.

It is proposed to consider three main headings:

- (a) small *groups*, formed for specific, sometimes single, functional purposes. 'Small' implies a range of roughly 10-100 members;
- (b) larger, or 'secondary' *organisations*, often with 500 or more members (eg a large co-operative),²⁰ usually multi-purpose, often part of two or more tier structure;
- (c) elected *committees* (eg *panchayats*), representative, usually with a wide range of functions, often with a semi-governmental or administrative role, usually in a tiered structure. Such committees often have more widely-defined concerns than the development of agriculture alone.

2 Small groups

As we have seen, small groups, in great variety, have been evolved in traditional cultures, usually for *specific* tasks, in which the group has a clear *common interest*, sometimes *intermittent*, often *loosely structured*, often not part of the hierarchy, eg housing groups, small primary co-operatives, wood-carving groups, etc. Often they are characterised by *informal, personalised management*, sometimes mainly by consensus. They may include big as well as small farmers.²¹

We can attempt some list of the advantages, sources of strength, durability, and also of weaknesses of such groups. For example, in a milk-producing group, the technology largely dictates what has to be done and when; the size of the group is limited by the physical boundaries of the system; the benefits are obvious and shared by all; there is not much reason for conflict with other groups; the organisational and behavioural demand on members is relatively simple; dependence on officialdom may be limited to one to two specific services; membership is defined by those using the facility. The group's small size favours cohesiveness, and may even be strengthened by the existence of an external 'enemy', eg African cotton-growers versus Asian ginners (Mwanza, Tanzania). Organisational simplicity may avoid exploitation by a formalised 'management committee', eg the small groups in which Comilla farmers were organised, hamlet by hamlet.²² It would be easy to write down a set of antonyms, with reference to large, multi-purpose co-operatives, where most of the directness and cohesiveness is apt to be lacking.

The literature is, unfortunately, very vague about the origins of such groups. In some cases it is clear that a single man took an initiative; in others statements such as 'a group was formed', or 'farmers formed themselves into a group' leave no clue as to how, by whom, in what sequences this critical event took place. Equally unfortunately, particularly in 'success stories', we have an encouraging account of group formation and valuable successes in village or area X in 1971-3; but is it still there? Has it grown in numbers and success or disintegrated? In consequence, perhaps our most reliable information is constantly drawn only from the 5 per cent of schemes which have been studied over five or ten years at least, or revisited after that sort of interval. We are left with categories of 'spontaneous'²³ (including traditional), 'catalysed by an external individual'²⁴ (eg an extension worker), and 'semi-imposed by external authority'.²⁵ It is probable, but by no means certain, that the durability of groups tends to be higher when original dependence on external support or pressure is low (ie when self-management starts at a very early stage), except where external support (including paid management) is continuous over a considerable period. There are certainly many cases among co-operatives where an officially-backed group collapses as soon as official support is withdrawn.

The weaknesses of small groups tend to show up if numbers increase sharply, or the complexity and ambitiousness of the task increases, so that informal or face-to-face management structure and cohesiveness is weakened. That such groups are strong in informal leadership and weak on formal management structure, and in relationship with the outside world (government and major institutions) is fairly well documented (the need for 'brokers', the need for financial competence and accounting).²⁶ This can be partly paralleled from studies in industry, where small, insulated sections or departments can generate high morale, which is destroyed by merger or major expansion, or 'rationalisation'; even a change from small rooms (groups of a dozen) to large, open-plan offices on conveyor lines can have devastating results on industrial or commercial morale; the same can be true of mergers of military units.

Pride of achievement is also a great consolidator of groups, and this is an argument (where an official policy is involved) for assigning in early stages simple and fairly easily achievable tasks which can show early and visible effects, ie to build groups round such tasks.²⁷ The opposite is apt to happen: because a task is difficult (ie credit recovery, marketing) a primary co-operative, often very weak in management, is set up to deal with it.

These paragraphs lead naturally to the question: What is the 'right' level of external involvement (usually called 'support')? This is a question which can be answered only in very general terms. First, 'support' can be defined as (1) requested or essential *services* from the external economy, on offer but not insisted upon (eg credit, fertiliser, infrastructure), and (2) internal management support (provision of secretary, of close supervision, or strong influence in decision-making). It is fairly clear that efficient services are usually helpful. But when it comes to management support it seems probable that half-measures are usually unsuccessful. Either the group is self-managed, or the authority

concerned should decide, in effect, to manage it, and to continue to do so. Excessive supervision (eg by a co-operative department, or by a federation or union of its primary societies) usually kills the dynamic of the group. There is much evidence that primary co-operatives (Kenya, India) resent the contributions paid to higher tiers and the rules and supervision imposed upon them. They lose the sense of self-management and responsibility.²⁸

Group leadership may come (a) from within the group, (b) from an individual within the society, but with some extra qualification (education, technical skill, devotion, larger resources). Examples of (b) personally noticed recently include a Catholic priest, a school teacher, a Gandhian disciple (Manubhai Desai, outside Poona), a retired veterinary officer, a large farmer, an ex-sergeant major. It is possible — though this should be treated with care — that such local outsiders make acceptable leaders because they are outside the rivalries and suspicions of equals in the group.²⁹ Groups may be started (but not led) by local officials, suggestions from a VSO or Peace Corps worker, Oxfam or some other voluntary agency, a church, or simply three or four enthusiasts who take an initiative but accept other leadership in order to gain recruits or influence. Leaders of the (b) type may continue for some time, since they are an obvious choice as 'broker' when more external contacts are needed, and also may have resources (storage, equipment, transport) from which the group may benefit. Paternalism is neither dead nor useless in many parts of the developing world.³⁰

Finally, it is worth stressing again the variety of types, sizes, functions of informal groups, and also the number of occasions when a common pattern of development action can arise without the necessity for any formal group. The 'outgrowers' in a tea, tobacco, sugar, etc scheme producing to a central factory and serviced from its management, may not require formal association, where a company or board is the managing agent; or, where the factory is co-operative-owned and managed, they may only have a shareholder function and an occasional vote for committee membership. Similarly, common use of a water source *may* involve a group, or may simply be done by water-buying arrangements. Credit, which is often very individual, may be organised through a group, but may also flow from agricultural banks direct to individuals, who are in any case usually personally liable for repayment. The argument for small, semi-formal groups is essentially opportunistic and flexible; and this, in situations of such social, technical and economic variety and diversity, is three-quarters of its strength. The requirements of the crop (or water supply for crops), density or sparseness of settlement, the nature of the processing unit, the marketing system (monopoly or open local market), the degree of risk, the requirement for quality (eg uniformity); the need for regularity of supply, seasonality, may each have effects on whether a group is needed and, if so, of what size, what continuity or intermittence, with what formal structure and management competence. Mistakes are far more likely to be made by insisting on a *particular* structure (eg the co-operative), or size (theoretical but not always significant economies of scale), or membership (eg excluding large farmers), or simply by neglecting the potential of unorthodox or very lightly-

structured arrangements, including private commercial arrangements as against formal semi-public 'institutions', whose rules and required procedures may be inimical to a rather hesitant and inexperienced membership.³¹ We assume here that the objective is not ideology but success.

3 Larger, or secondary organisations

There appear to be rather a large number of occasions in agricultural development when an enterprise of some apparent potential is successfully launched, well rewarded for a year or two, and then disintegrates. This can certainly happen where a small, loosely-organised group is emboldened by success to launch into larger operations requiring more complex financial and administrative control. There would appear to be a moment when the two best choices are: (1) to persuade the group to stay at the level which it can manage, or (2) to launch a larger, or secondary organisation, which will necessarily be more formal and may involve adding a superior tier to the structure. Thus, at Comilla, the Co-operative Union was in fact needed, and extremely useful, when the small primary groups, stimulated by Akhter Hameed Khan's philosophy and action, needed a better contact with the external economy.³²

But we have chosen a dangerous example in mentioning a co-operative. For while the successes of an outstanding co-operative union usually are described in terms of the range of excellent and useful services it provides to its primary society membership (eg credit provision, a rice mill, storage, custom service for tractors or spraying equipment, a transport service etc), the really important pay-off from the venture *is in the formation of the primary societies*. Thereafter, the superior services are to be judged not by whether they are co-operative, but by whether they are efficient and competitive. For we must keep an eye on the ultimate aim of the whole effort, which is not a rich and successful union but enriched and satisfied members at village level, and the 'superior' services can come from a variety of sources — from a union, certainly, but also from a company, a marketing board, a corporation, a bank, or even from an efficient extension service. The criterion here is neither democracy, nor self-management, nor socialism — for all these are much better expressed, in a face-to-face way, at the primary level.³³ The criterion is efficiency — getting supplies to the farmer in time, providing credit or storage, paying a good price promptly, using capital reserves for wise investment, surviving through bad years as well as good ones, controlling bad debts.³⁴

Thus, at the moment when primary or small groups need more external contact, better management, more structure, the co-operative method (and there are variants within this method) must certainly be considered very seriously. But it should not be an automatic choice, since many alternatives are available. Managerial efficiency and services to farmers should be the main criteria by which choice is made.

Among larger organisations we should place the Taiwan Farmer Associations, the Malaysian Farmer Association schemes, the '*Markaz*' organisations in Pakistan, the Farmer Service Societies adopted in India for service to the small

groups formed under the Small Farmer Development Agency.³⁵ The last-named, which are a co-operative variant, are appointed rather than elected, with 50 per cent official membership and a paid secretary, accountant and clerk. Both in Malaysia and Taiwan the farmer associations are considerable, multi-tier organisations, officially instituted. Although the Taiwan organisation is in a free-enterprise, capitalist context, it bears many of the marks of the Mainland China system in its comprehensive and planned policies; it is an example — not necessarily to be copied in other conditions — of what can be achieved by a firm, officially engineered programme which has struck just the right balance (for the capacities of both government and people) between self-management and central direction and support.

We will leave assessments to the last sections of this chapter.

4 Elected committees

Some countries have given considerable weight, for a variety of reasons, to locally elected committees, through which the governments' rural development programmes can be implemented at the lowest level. The 'basic democracy' systems under Ayub Khan, where the final unit was a group of villages; the Tanzanian system (village development committees much based on TANU),³⁶ some elements of the Egyptian system; the Indian *panchayat* system (village, block and district) — these are all variants.

'Basic democracy' died in Pakistan, and now seems to be being replaced by service and marketing centres (*Markaz*), not wholly unlike the Indian farmer service societies; and our impression is that village development committees in Tanzania slowly are being replaced by (a) TANU branches, (b) co-operatives, and (c) the *ujamaa* village system, which is more of an executive organisation than the original VDCs. While the 'basic democracy' and the Tanzanian systems both in effect rely on a universal party to give leadership and initiative, the Egyptian system is more of a dirigiste, post land-reform mechanism mainly run by officials, though co-operative in form, to implement central government policy. Local co-operatives in Egypt do not decide policy, do not operate within an encompassing ideology, and have rather limited functions.³⁷

The Indian system is notably different in intention. In the first place, it was intended to be free of party politics, and elections are not fought under party labels (though in fact by now highly party-political). Secondly, it has a number of objectives which do not lie easily together. One was to debureaucratise administration by giving considerable initiative and responsibility to locally elected non-officials — thereby causing officials to serve two masters, the committee and their departmental superiors. Another was the more classic local government philosophy, of giving to local authorities a large chunk of governmental responsibilities in their area; and the three tiers, of which the district and block committees are quite powerful, presumably were instituted for this purpose. A third, in some conflict with the ban on party politics, was to extend the democratic process and general political education right down to the grass roots of society.

The Indian system has worked very differently in different states. It might reasonably be said that the village *panchayat* does give an element of face-to-face democracy, but that, whether as local government or as development, the three-tier system as a whole has, in the main, been overshadowed by the technical, planning and financing elements of the governmental development process, which continuously strengthens the influence of departments, technicians, and bureaucratic regulation. Above all, the system has not often shown itself capable of agricultural management in the field, of the energetic use of farmer groups and organisations, partly because that field has been pre-empted so heavily by the very powerful co-operative organisation, which has retained an almost total independence as well as a semi-monopoly of farmer group organisation.

On the whole, in a highly technical, planning-conscious, centralising epoch, the freely elected three-tier democratic local government experiments do not seem to have much future in Idcs for development purposes, and seem likely to be replaced by organisations like the *Markaz* or the farmer service society, or, in communalist systems, by the variants of the Maoist ruling organisation. This does not exclude some form of local authority for minor regulative, social service, and taxation purposes.

D Opportunity and organisation

We may seem to have assumed that the chief need of development is better structures of organisation, and that opportunities for development are universally available if only the 'right' system of organisation were available — we might even be accused of Popery.³⁸ In fact, the difficulty of identifying opportunity, and the question of finding an organisation suited to the opportunity, which has something extra to and different from a good organisation chart or systems analysis,³⁹ is the main underlying theme of all these chapters.

Development opportunities have presumably always seemed to be scarce; and the more that have been found, the greater the excuse for supposing that by now, in a given area, they have all been used. Yet we can be sure that in twenty years' time thousands more opportunities, great and small, will have been identified in every part of the world. The recipe for finding opportunity is like the road drill 'Stop! Look! Listen!'. Stopping means that you must stay or be in quite a small area long enough to know just what is (agriculturally and socially) going on. Looking is more difficult, since it requires imagination, and all of us most of the time have eyes and see not. For looking creatively at what seems to be an unchangeable situation (poor soil, little water, distant market, or whatever) requires the power to imagine what it would be like *if one factor were changed* — put in a well, an animal, a tree-crop, a craft (eg *Wakamba* carving in Kenya) — and the whole picture may change. We need not expatiate on 'Listen!'.⁴⁰

The foregoing paragraph really belongs to our earlier chapter on diagnosis. But it is relevant here, for two reasons. First, because opportunity comes before organisation. Many of the failures, including the group systems which have

failed, are a result of the fact that no real opportunity had been perceived; and opportunities are hardly ever created simply by forming groups large or small, self-managed or administered. Sometimes the failure to 'Look' is social; quite a few of the small and marginal farmer schemes recently visited in India could have been put in fifteen years ago. But the schemes were, in those cases, for *Harijans* and Scheduled Castes, and the extension services (as Ascroft and Leonard have noted in Kenya⁴¹) simply do not 'see' a considerable portion of the small and poor farmers. Sometimes it is through lack of technical experience and imagination. But whatever the cause, a feasible and profitable programme should come, in time and in importance, before a detailed organisational decision.

This leads to the second reason. The organisational choice will often have to be shaped by the nature of the opportunity seen. It is, in our view, rare that a full-scale co-operative will be the right *first* answer, for reasons given in discussing small groups. But it may be needed as a second-stage, larger type of organisation which can lift a small success into a wider sphere of marketing and investment. It is also, we believe, relatively rare that heavy crop-season credit will be the right solution in the first stages of exploiting opportunity, mainly for the risk-aversion reasons given in the first section of this chapter on traditional attitudes. To put it another way, there are so many social, and technical, and tenurial, and micro-economic reasons why an abrupt step into capital-intensive production methods can be — has been — extremely risky for those who bear the risk — the farmers. Longer-term credit, for *investments which alter a factor in a previously stalled situation*, may indeed be frequently necessary; but this is another way of saying that investment probably antecedes organisation, and, in some cases, government may recover the investment by making the farmer pay for it. These remarks are added to give one more push at the (now tottering) idol of 'crop-season credit and co-operatives' as the two cure-alls for agricultural advance, useful as they may be in a closely defined range of situations.

III Some conclusions

General

The main general themes which have run through all sections of this chapter, whether dealing with traditional or with already modernising communities, are:

- (1) the tug-of-war between security and opportunity, and the gradual building of some form of social security to replace subsistence through group action supported by state services;
- (2) the vagueness in definition of words such as groups, democracy, participation, self-management, 'barefoots', and the need to relate these to situation, technology and social timing;
- (3) the specificity and variety of functional tasks and situations, matched by the specificity and variety of development opportunities, in place and in timing⁴²
An 'opportunity' is real only if it can be used within a *total*, current situation;

- (4) the requirement that organisation — in this chapter, the nature and use of groups — should take account of this functional variety, and of the social and technical sequences in a major transition;
- (5) the fact that the identification of real opportunity and of related investment precede the final choice of organisational method.

Groups

Groups have certain characteristics 'of their own' (group psychology), on which we have touched very lightly, perhaps inadequately. It is probably safe to say that certain quantitative jumps in size produce a qualitative change in style and behaviour. We have emphasised the potential for cohesiveness, morale, pride in achievement, and values attached to independence (self-management) of small 'groups', defined as 10-100 members. There is probably an even stronger emphasis in the range 10-20, illustrated in so many situations (games, platoons, tracking, work groups); but in all cases function and situation, and ease and frequency of meeting, may modify the result. In consequence, we have emphasised the small group, with precise and limited function, common interest, and light formal structure as of high potential in the early stages of social modernisation. Such groups have some similarity to traditional groups in their limited, sometimes intermittent function, and in the wide variety of functions and situations in which a group of this type can be used. Although similarity and acceptability of background is probably necessary for easy working, maximum homogeneity in group membership is certainly not required, and indeed some variety in skills is probably useful; some form of social distance or neutrality (eg education or experience) may well be desirable in the group leadership.

But although the small group has advantages, it is also weak in management and usually in external contact, and this shows up when success leads to larger enterprise requiring both. Here the 'larger (or 'secondary') organisation' steps in. In terms of Maoist China, it is perhaps significant that the smallest unit (the team) has shown up best in morale, and the commune (two tiers higher) in management; possibly the intermediate level (brigade) is neither small enough for one nor large enough for the other. It is not, in our view, necessary that the larger organisation should bear the same form and title — eg a co-operative union above a co-operative primary. For what is required of the higher stage is service and management efficiency, rather than morale or democracy which are better achieved in the smaller unit. There are alternatives in private enterprise, in parastatal organisations, and in government-run service centres for performing these service and business-management functions. Attempts by the secondary unit to merge small units, or to regulate them (as against serving them) usually have adverse results, especially in morale.

It is reasonable for readers to demand that we should come off the fence, after such a long balancing act. So, very briefly, our *main conclusions* on group use, where groups are needed, would run roughly as follows.

- (1) At the primary (and sometimes initial) level of organisation, we see most

virtue in the relatively small, single-function group, strictly related to a specific opportunity, where success may be minor but fairly certainly achievable. We think that this should be, wherever possible, self-managed (the wind of leadership bloweth where it listeth) and closely supported (but not directed or dominated) by services. If a co-operative is chosen or required, it should be of this nature (single-purpose, function-oriented, with minimal imposed rules, with membership limited to function).

(2) At the secondary level, efficiency should be the dominant criterion, and there are (see above) a considerable range of variants in the tool kit. Choices between them will depend upon the particular function (crop-production – what crop? What technical constraints, what processing/marketing channel?, etc). It will also depend upon the nature of the primary groups to be served, and on a decision on the degree of management needed. The farmer service society, with a considerable external management input, lies between totally managed systems (company, corporation, board, etc), and the totally elected co-operative which has dangers both on the management side and on the political distribution of power and benefits in some societies. We regard co-operatives, at both levels, provided the warnings at each level are heeded, as a valid but not an invariable choice.

(3) As regards wider-function elected committees, in tiers, we are inclined to think that this is essentially a political choice, and that, outside fully communalist societies with monolithic direction, such systems are not likely to be developmentally efficient, mainly because of (a) the high technical element in development, (b) the multiplicity of functions, and (c) the multiple, and not always mutually consistent expectations which such systems are called upon to fulfil.

We have distinguished total post-revolution communalism from the variegated chequerboard of more gradualist systems, which are themselves in a transitional political process, in many countries towards a more equitable spread of development benefits. We have not attempted analysis of the fully communalist systems, mainly because the same detailed evidence has not been gathered, or at least is not easily and reliably available. In the case of the gradualist systems there is a sporadic, uneven, multi-fronted struggle to advance. Each step, opening up new vistas of possibility, exposing new tensions and sometimes exacerbating old ones, will lead where it will lead – in some cases to revolution itself, in some cases to accelerated reform.

Such a process requires much patience and faith. It also – and particularly if it takes place as we have suggested, by gradual steps, locally adapted – will put a great strain on donors. For the temptation to back generalised theories and the ambition that ‘our’ project should succeed, embodied particularly in project staff anxious for their personal success and reputation, will not easily accept the modesty, opportunism and patience which is the necessary attitude for such work. It is admittedly difficult, when a donor is investing a large sum, to resist the temptation to insist on close supervision; to demand that only the very best

of local officers should be used (if necessary, robbing other districts for them); to use local committees, set up to ensure democratic involvement, chiefly for collecting credit debts or administering unpopular regulations – a mistake often made by colonial governments operating ‘indirect rule’. But all these actions weaken local responsibility and initiative, and endanger the future, not only of the project itself but of its replication in other areas. These limitations do not apply much to major physical infrastructure – dams, trunk roads, etc – which may well be designed and built by foreign aid; but they apply in full force to the small-scale social and agricultural development which should be the pay-off from such schemes. Increased effort by donors to bring development directly to the poorest sections will therefore imply a radical change in the donor approach to such field work.⁴³

We are unfortunately short of detailed and precise accounts of just how small groups emerge, and we have only sparse evidence of the value attached to self-management,⁴⁴ usually in the negative form of complaints against ‘interference’ by a higher tier in the hierarchy or by officials; these are certainly widespread. We could argue that if the task or situation is such that an external managerial input is essential, then it should be decisive, continuous and efficient, not intermittent, complaining and merely regulative.

We are also sadly short of natural history studies of groups, and any attempts to study the subsequent progress of groups of which only the successful start has been recorded would be extremely welcome.

Finally, quite a large number of recommendations and policy directions are implicit in the analysis of this chapter. They are not listed formally here because we recognise that comments will no doubt suggest reformulations. It is important that what is actually recommended should have behind it the largest possible element of consensus and of information.

Comments are welcome on the whole chapter, and, in particular, information and comments on the following issues:

- (1) the detailed process of original group formation;
- (2) effects of size;
- (3) leadership;
- (4) durability – life history of small groups;
- (5) the degree of external supervision or management which is desirable (in what circumstances);
- (6) the relationship between small groups and ‘superior’ organisation. Should these be regarded, not as superior, but solely in a service relationship?

See also Annexes A and B.

Annex A: Some mainly sociological notes and references on co-operatives

There is a mountain of publications on co-operatives, ranging from promotional material through field reports and case studies to critical academic analysis. This note adds only a little elaboration on the sociological side, ie the *nature* of co-operatives as institutions in developing countries, to the statements and references in the text. Most of it refers to two publications based on East African material and on two more general studies:

- (1) *Co-operatives and Rural Development in East Africa*, edited by Carl Gosta Widstrand, Uppsala, Scandinavian Institute of African Studies (Africana Publications Corporation, New York, 1971), referred to as 'The Uppsala Seminar' below.
- (2) *Efficiency versus Distribution in East African Co-operatives*, Goran Hyden, Nairobi, East African Literature Bureau, 1973.
- (3) *Two Blades of Grass: Rural Co-operatives in Agricultural Modernisation*, edited by Peter Worsley, Manchester University Press, 1971, referred to as 'The IDS Seminar' (original Papers), or *Two Blades of Grass* (published book).
- (4) *Rural Co-operatives as Agencies of Change*, Volume VIII of the UNRISD reports on 'Rural Institutions and Planned Change', Geneva, 1975, referred to as 'UNRISD'.

To keep this note reasonably short we have had to eschew all but very short verbatim quotation. But for those interested, but also pressed for time, there is a 10-page summary, with more quotation and comment, available from ODI,⁴⁵ and also a review of *Two Blades of Grass*.⁴⁶ These preceded publication of (2) and (4) above, but cover much of the material.

Perhaps even more material would not help much. For two things stand out in this subject. First, the amazing unanimity of almost every objective evaluation of co-operative functioning in Idcs, and the almost equal similarity of findings from all over the world; and, second, the pitifully feeble influence which these findings have had on government policies, except in India. This massive evidence that, except in a limited range of circumstances, co-operatives are not likely to achieve *both* the economic *and* the social objectives set for them (at most, one *or* the other) has not deterred governments, even today, from establishing them and expecting *both* across the board. It is significant that, in 1975, faced by the UNRISD Report, the International Co-operative Alliance, largely supported by ILO and to a lesser extent by FAO, simply refused to accept the evidence,⁴⁷ drawn from three continents; and they had presumably also rejected the evidence of the other three (earlier) publications mentioned here. Evidently, many more failures are needed, and the final criticism is likely to come, not from academics, but from disillusion among the farmers themselves, which is already growing, and from the success of variant approaches.

Traditional, capitalist/individualist, and socialist attitudes: transition, solidarity and faction

(a) Traditional phase

Perhaps the principal sociological findings concern the nature of traditional forms of solidarity (or co-operation) and the abruptly different nature of the attitudes and performance which are expected of co-operatives, as modernising institutions, by those who institute them.

Dore⁴⁸ points out that traditional communal labour groups are not normally whole community groups but are formed, in various sub-groups, for specific, usually intermittently occurring tasks. He further adds that 'the cohesiveness and the authoritarianism are inextricably combined in the traditional structures, and destruction of authority patterns is likely to lead to break-down in solidarity too'.

Weintraub⁴⁹ notes that traditional solidarity is needed to give coherence at the outset of *Moshavim* formation, to hold sub-groups within a larger grouping; it may then either lead to faction or be replaced by a modern and different type of whole-group solidarity, if the timing and occasion is right.

Hyden⁵⁰ stresses that traditional solidarity is aimed at meeting collective need (eg path-clearing), not at a way of securing individual economic benefit by common organisation. Hyden⁵¹ further points out that 'the horizontal ties of economic interest' (eg between farmers in different communities but with similar interests and constraints) 'have not replaced the vertical ties of social obligation based on such units as clan, village, etc.' Migot-Adholla⁵² notes that not only are co-operative tasks different in kind from traditional collective tasks but represent an expansion of scale. He concludes: 'There is no direct continuity between autochthonous co-operative forms and modern marketing co-operatives'.

Hyden moreover questions the Western assumption that Africans do not want 'big men' to lead them, or that riches are unjust; on the contrary, 'big men' succeed, and Africans want to compete, get out of the herd, and succeed too. They do not believe the view that one man's riches make another man poor.⁵³ It is for this reason that Africans tend to follow 'people with a wider view and experience of the world outside the local rural community. To this category belong teachers, priests, traders, administrators and politicians'.⁵⁴

For variety of scene we need only add a word from Pacific studies: 'I am not aware of any traditional authority structure in the Pacific which could be carried over intact into co-operatives.'⁵⁵ 'The organisation and functioning of traditional communitarian institutions are so fundamentally different from modern structures that they cannot be considered as part of the same continuum.'⁵⁶

(b) Transition – individualism – socialism

We thus have a situation where the imposition of a modern co-operative on a society used to quite different forms of common action but also beginning to

modernise, results in dominance of the co-operative by 'bigger' men of one sort or another, who are either economic or political entrepreneurs.

This is put succinctly in UNRISD: 'What often happens in practice, when co-operatives are introduced into rural areas characterised by dependency relations, is not replacement of dependency by self-reliance but perpetuation of dependency in another form, under the co-operative or ... a new dependency system in which the State becomes the new patron.'⁵⁷ Myrdal states the same in more political form: '... the co-operative fails to incorporate a frontal attack on the existing inegalitarian power structure. Indeed, it aims at improving conditions without disturbing that structure ...'⁵⁸

The issue is taken up by J.S. Saul,⁵⁹ P.S. Cohen⁵⁹ and Lionel Cliffe.⁶⁰ The essential point is that the attempt to introduce co-operatives on top of many forms of traditional society becomes a first step towards an 'individualist' or 'capitalist' or 'entrepreneurial' society with emphasised local inequality. Hence one conclusion — that the social revolution must precede co-operatives if they are to be egalitarian or democratic in an egalitarian sense. Hence the remark of Saul that perhaps 'socialism is necessary to co-operatives rather than co-operatives to socialism.'

In fact, in this situation, three choices may be available: (a) to insist on social revolution; (b) to accept the entrepreneurial result, in the hopes of later social evolution towards democracy; (c) to seek, by less formal groupings and initiatives, to shift traditional forms of common action into new activities. Thomas Carroll⁶¹ hints at this: 'In Vicos the gradual, adaptive and sensitively administered techniques of modernisation took advantage of already existing joint activities ... This was achieved by utilising the available community structure in building and reorienting its functions rather than by adding new institutions.'

It is this third choice to which our text adheres, for two reasons. First, to avoid either revolutionary Utopianism or a bland acceptance of continuing dependence. Second, to make better use, *without* imposing a precast formula, of the real wealth of traditional institutions which does often exist. 'Recent field investigations around Shinan (Shantung) revealed that in 27 districts there are 18 types and 57 kinds of traditional co-operative societies. Their purposes ... include cultivation, marketing, loans, savings, general labour, self-defence, famine prevention and ... mutual help for weddings, funerals, care of children, band music, common temple worship and travel.'⁶²

It is perhaps necessary to underline one point even more heavily. Neither the text nor these references are hostile to co-operatives *as such*. There may well be — indeed, there are many proven cases — where, in a much more advanced stage of commercialisation (eg in the modern Punjab) co-operatives fill a highly important role. The whole stress here is on the illusion that they can simply be: (a) imposed on (b) a society still primarily guided by traditional attitudes (c) at once. We give the last word to a very widely experienced author, and one who worked for a life-time on co-operative development: 'Success of rural

co-operatives [in India] presupposes a modicum of social equality, political democracy, and economic viability among villagers . . . Today, co-operatives are being asked to create their own preconditions, to reconstruct village society, so that ordinary peasants can make effective use of the co-operative method. This is too much to expect. To rush ahead prematurely with co-operatives is to invite failure and to give co-operation a bad name.’⁶³

(c) Size of group

‘Effective participation decreases sharply with increasing membership . . . The economies of processing and marketing need an expanding scale, while effective participation needs a drastically decreasing scale.’⁶⁴ This point really needs no more references. It is a fairly obvious pointer to the difference in quality between the small, primary group and the necessarily wider scope of a secondary organisation.

(d) Government interference

There is again little need for references to confirm that much interference from above, whether from a co-operative union on a primary, or from government on either, usually results in ‘indifference and apathy and . . . a feeling that [the members] cannot influence decisions about their own co-operative or their own future.’⁶⁵

Annex B: J. Tendler, *Evaluation of Small Farmer Organisations* (AID Project Report No 1, Ecuador, July 1975, mimeo)

Tendler’s excellent report contains much thoughtful comment, and interesting examples of variants in small farmer organisation. Just a few points will be summarised here under five heads.

1 Aid agencies’ approach

(a) Aid agencies tended to adopt the ‘numbers’ approach to small farmer organisations, judging success by such indices as dues intake; agencies tended to concentrate on achievement of institutional goals, rather than development efficiency.

(b) Many agency expectations were unreasonable or contradictory; eg that co-operatives could ‘democratise’ the countryside (unreasonable because co-operative benefits are exclusive to their members; because co-ops are best viewed as selective instruments of change, not as universal instruments of democratisation); eg ‘self-sufficiency’ goals and ‘termination of support’ dates (self-defeating because institutions, members, and external contractors giving the support all stand to lose if these goals are achieved).

(c) Agencies seemed to be committed to emphasising ‘agricultural credit provision’ to the neglect of other objectives. Credit unions, which could provide attractive and secure interest, accepted non-member deposits, were dispersed,

unpretentious, and used locally-known officers, successfully mobilised rural savings, but were noticed only in so far as they were seen as vehicles for credit.

(d) Tendler questions 'the almost universal belief of AID and other co-op promoters in the goodness of aggregation [resulting] from one of the basic justifications for co-operatives: that they enable small individual producer units in banding together, to achieve economies of scale in production or marketing.' 'The implicit assumption of US co-op thinking was that scale economies went on forever, from local to regional to national to international groupings.' Aggregation was not always economically justifiable; aggregation and geographic extension nearly always reduced effective primary member participation.

2 Single-function, infrastructure group

Among other examples, Tendler describes the success of small irrigation groups formed and operated by the farmers themselves. Members are responsible for the design, construction, maintenance and operation of their schemes. The groups are self-financing. They came into being, without external prompting, to tap the many streams flowing through the highlands; they control approximately half the water distributed to all agriculture in Ecuador, at a lower cost than the government water agency. (The government water schemes, though technically sound, had administrative difficulties which meant that they often failed to deliver water, though the structures existed.) The technology of water distribution dictated what had to be done and when; group size was limited by the boundary of the system; no difficult demands for inter-group co-operation arose.

3 Groups as an organisational form

Tendler argues for experiment in non-co-operative forms of small farmer organisation, on the grounds: 'It cannot be overemphasised how alien and difficult a form of organisation the co-operative is to impose on peasant society; it is justified only if the goals to be achieved can best be met with this organisational form.' She argues that co-operatives should be used selectively; in many cases, organisations which require less in terms of organisational behaviour were more appropriate. This finding strongly confirms the weight of findings in Annex A.

4 Role of non-co-operative groups in small localities

Tendler found that some organisational forms, such as credit unions, far from seeking to overthrow local hierarchies, 'empowered local elites in a way that made it to their interest to channel benefits to small farmers.' The tiny geo-political area of most credit unions meant that local elites had both the position and incentive to act as brokers for the poorest farmers; they fulfilled a vital role liaising with the various town bureaucracies (which otherwise the peasant could not afford the time or money to approach, nor possessed the contacts, influence, or know-how to do so). Local 'big men' had an essential role as

mediators; groups which used them could bring about a highly decentralised disbursement of development inputs. Such groups were, of necessity, conservative, 'establishment' organisations; they were accused by radicals of pre-empting support which might otherwise be drawn into political action for significant structural change and agrarian reform.

5 Role of co-operatives

The report in many places indicates reasons why the co-op approach is 'unworkable as a global strategy for small farmers'. Much of the co-op literature fails to realise that government sponsorship and subsidy, rather than the co-operative form itself, account for much of co-op organisations' success. In many co-ops, over 50 per cent of sales income arises from non-member purchases; though unplanned, non-member involvement often makes a significant contribution to co-op success. The report notes the initial incompatibility of the demands of commercial professionalism in co-ops, with the winning of the allegiance of peasants, and mentions (cf R.F. Dore) the 'institutionalised suspicion' built in to many credit-extending operations. The report urges that co-op planning be highly selective and specific. Experience suggests that some co-ops should be planned with short life-expectations.

References

- 1 So normally referred to: eg barbers, and what might be called service trades.
- 2 W. and C. Wiser, *Behind Mud Walls*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1963, p119.
- 3 E.G. Davy, 'Drought in West Africa', *W.M.O. Bulletin*, XXIII, Geneva, January 1974.
- 4 T. Scarlett Epstein, *Economic Development and Social Change in Sputh India*, Manchester University Press, 1962.
- 5 'Social services may be commuted under certain conditions by a cash payment – an administrative endeavour to replace by money the services lost to the community when they are not performed.' G.K. Roth, *Native Administration in Fiji During the Past Seventy-Five Years*, Occasional Paper No 10, Royal Anthropological Institute, London, 1951.
- 6 C.R. Wharton, in G. Dalton (ed), *Economic Development and Social Change*, New York, Natural History Press, 1969.
- 7 C.G. Knight, *Ecology and Change*, New York, Academic Press, 1974.
- 8 Personal Communication from R.N. Haldipur.
- 9 C. Turnbull, *The Lonely African*, Garden City, New York, Anchor Press, 1963.
- 10 Quoted in a memo by W. P. Clarke, in A. Gaitskell, *Gezira*, London, Faber and Faber, 1959, p202.
- 11 *Behind Mud Walls*, op cit, p122.
- 12 'Political will at the centre may not be enough. Even a highly efficient administration may not be able to give reality to the reforms at village level, where quite junior officials are faced by the determination and resourcefulness of a dominant landlord class and by the fear and insecurity of an illiterate and unorganised peasantry, fearful of losing the security of a bad system without cast-iron assurance of protection if they oppose it.' G. Hunter, *Modernising Peasant Societies*, Oxford University Press, London, 1969, p150.
- 13 There is a considerable sociological literature about the transition from 'traditional' to modernising organisation. We have summarised some of the most recent and relevant work, with particular reference to the contrasts between traditional groups and modern co-operatives, in Annex A. We have also added in Annex B some particularly interesting (summarised) findings from the work of Judith Tendler in Ecuador. (These two Annexes could be treated as an extension of the main text.) They reinforce strongly the similarity of findings from a great range of areas in Latin America, Tropical Africa, and Asia. References to Annex B are marked simply 'Tendler' with a paragraph reference.
- 14 Tendler, 1 (c).
- 15 Rasmusson, R. 'Social Emphasis on Peoples' Priorities in Rural Development: Studies in Kenya', *Agricultural Administration*, Vol 2, No 4, October 1975, pp263-84.
- 16 Tendler, 3.
- 17 We have avoided 'Communism', since not all countries following communalist systems are 'Communist', eg Tanzania.
- 18 Note, however, that fragmentation of holdings sometimes operated to give farmers each a patch of good and a patch of poor land. Traditional arrangements sometimes also work like this, eg the plot boundaries in Kisii District radiating from hill top to valley, or the Kikuyo (Kenya) plots running down from the ridge to the stream. A similar pattern can be seen in Wiltshire chalk-country farms with plots taking in (a) some watermeadow, (b) some arable, and (c) sheep pasture on the high ground.
- 19 G. Hyden, 'The Struggle for Success in Rural Co-operation: the Case of Kabuku Ndani Ujamaa Co-operative Society', University of Dar es Salaam, 1976, mimeo.
- 20 Note that Co-operatives are not taken as a discriminatory category at this point – they could exist as small groups, or as larger organisations, or as a sequence from small to large.
- 21 ie we are speaking, with reference to farmers, of small groups of farmers, not exclusively of groups of small farmers.

- 22 Tendler, 2.
- 23 Holmquist, F., *Matunwa Farmers Co-operative Society and the Co-operative Farming Experiment in Kisii District, Kenya*, Staff Paper No 106, IDS, Nairobi, July 1971.
- 24 Mbugua, E.S.; Schönherr, S.; Wyeth, P., 'Agricultural Extension and Farmers' Training', chapter 8 in *Second Evaluation Report on the Special Rural Development Programme*, IDS, Nairobi, 1975.
- 25 Sylvester, A., 'Helping the Thailand Smallholders: FAO Blazes the Trail'. *Civilizations*, Vol XX, No 2, 1970, pp212-225.
- 26 F.G. Bailey: *Caste and the Economic Frontier*, Manchester University Press, 1957.
- 27 P.C. Eatherley, 'The Sever da Vouga Project, 1967-70', Shell International, 1972.
- 28 E. Karanja, 'The Problems of Amalgamating Co-operative Societies: the Case of N. Tetu', Staff Paper No 97, IDS, Nairobi, April 1971
and, C.G. Widstrand (ed), *Co-operatives and Rural Development in East Africa*, New York, African Publishing Corporation, 1970. Tendler 1 (d) mentions the emphasis by AID (and other co-operative promoters) on economics of scale, and therefore on the universal goodness of aggregation, with the implicit assumption that economies of scale go on for ever, from local to regional, to national and even international groupings. This is one aspect only of the fascination of tiers of organisation which is common in administration and leads to post-box activity from one tier to another.
- 29 eg In England, the squire is chairman of the village cricket club, because the builder, primary teacher and grocer do not trust each other. Cf. remarks quoted by Arthur Gaitskell in his account of the Gezira scheme: 'the local villagers' first reactions to promptings towards responsibility had been "You decide for us. We will only quarrel among ourselves,"' p309.
- 30 Tendler, 4.
- 31 Ibid, 5.
- 32 Akhter Hameed Khan, *Reflections on the Comilla Rural Development Projects*, Washington, OLC Paper No 3, March 1974.
- 33 This seems to neglect the profit argument – that co-operative profits go to the membership, not to private pockets. But in fact both co-operatives and private merchants retain much of their profits for investment, and the *distributed* profit, which may look large in a single pocket, looks very small indeed when divided among 1,000 members, and may almost be cancelled out by the higher overheads and lower efficiency which tend to characterise amateur committee management. If this were not so, farmers would not so often prefer to sell privately rather than through co-operatives. See Annexes for further discussion and references.
- 34 See C. Widstrand, in C. Widstrand (ed), *African Co-operatives and Efficiency*, Uppsala, Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1972, for a distinction between 'efficiency' and 'effectiveness'. Efficiency, the more important measure, relates to analyses of productivity (how efficiently a co-operative serves farmers' needs); but much co-operative literature confines itself to discussion of 'co-operative effectiveness', defined as achievement of co-operative goals (often measured in terms of membership, credit advanced, etc). Cf. Tendler, 1 (a) and 1 (b).
- 35 For a brief description of the SFDA etc in February 1976, see our 'Network' report sent out in March.
- 36 Tanganyika African National Union – the one-party organisation in Tanzania. See H. Bienen, 'The Role of TANU and the Five-Year Plan in Tanganyika'. No source or date given. Mimeo.
- 37 See paper by El-Kammash to the Second International Seminar on Change in Agriculture at Reading University, September 1974. Report and Summarised Papers published as G. Hunter, A.H. Bunting, and A.F. Bottrall (eds): *Policy and Practice in Rural Development*, London, ODI–Croom Helm, 1976. The El-Kammash paper is available also in duplicated form from ODI, London.

- 38 'For forms of government let fools contest:
Whate'er is best administered is best', Alexander Pope.
- 39 The 'extra' lies in motivation and dynamics (self-management?), without which nothing flows along the arrows of the chart or system.
- 40 See, for example, Ardener's account of Cameroonian banana production, started by hearing a farmer say that bananas used to be grown in the area. S. Ardener, *Banana Co-operatives in the Southern Cameroons*, Conference Series 6, Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research, December 1958.
- 41 D.K. Leonard, 'Organisation Theory for Agricultural Development Agencies: an analysis of the Management of Kenya's Extension Agents', mimeo, 1974; Ascroft, Rölöng, Kariuki, Chege, *Extension and the Forgotten Farmer: First Report of a Field Experiment*, Nairobi, IDS, Bulletin No 37, Wageningen 1973.
- 42 M.P. Collinson, *Farm Management in Peasant Agriculture: a Handbook for Rural Development Planning in Africa*, New York, Praeger, 1972.
- 43 See S.H. Butterfield: 'Draft Summary Statement of a Practical Agency Approach to Rural Development', mimeo, AA/TA 28.2.75; and J.W. Green: 'Towards an Agenda for Social Science Research Supportive of the Effort to Reach the Rural Poor', mimeo, AA/TA, 4.4.75, for suggestions to alter AID's efforts in this direction. Both documents are of the greatest interest.
- 44 One of the major (and unfulfilled) demands of Australian Aborigines in early settlement schemes was: 'to farm land and sit down on it like white people, and manage we ourselves.' B. Barwick, in Penny and Epstein (eds), *Opportunity and Response*, Hurst and Co, London, 1972.
- 45 'Co-operatives: Effects of the Social Matrix' (duplicated), Guy Hunter, ODI, 1971.
- 46 Published in *The Journal of Administration Overseas*, July 1972.
- 47 eg an ICA comment: 'Only four of the fourteen Asian co-operatives were classified as "high impact".' The ICA wondered what prompted the inclusion of the other ten in the study, UNRISD, p30.
- 48 R.F. Dore, in *Two Blades of Grass*, p49.
- 49 D.O.V. Weintraub, *ibid* (eg p136).
- 50 Goran Hyden in *Efficiency versus Distribution*, pxiii.
- 51 Uppsala Seminar, p65.
- 52 S.E. Migot-Adholla, Uppsala Seminar, p36.
- 53 *Efficiency Versus Distribution*, p51. Hyden's view, based mainly on East African experience, would not necessarily be true of other societies.
- 54 Uppsala Seminar, p65.
- 55 R.G. Crocombe in *Two Blades of Grass*, p190.
- 56 Quoted by Thomas F. Carroll, *Two Blades of Grass*, p218. Texier's massive review of forms of pre-co-operative on a world-wide basis (one copy) is available only by visiting ILO.
- 57 UNRISD, p30.
- 58 G. Myrdal, *Asian Drama*, p1335, quoted by UNRISD, p72.
- 59 Both in *Two Blades of Grass*.
- 60 In the Uppsala Seminar.
- 61 *Two Blades of Grass*, p222.
- 62 G. Shillinglaw, quoting a rural survey in the 1930s, in *Two Blades of Grass*, p142.
- 63 Daniel Thorner, quoted by UNRISD, p111.
- 64 Carl Widstrand in Uppsala Seminar, pp241-250.
- 65 Carl Widstrand, *ibid*, p.237. See also Hyden, *passim*.

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