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*Self-Reliance or Dependence of Agricultural Economics
Research in Developing Countries*

The optimism which reigned at the beginning of the first 'decade of development' concerning the possibilities of growth possessed by Third World countries was replaced, little by little, by a much more circumspect attitude, justified by the numerous disappointments sustained by attempts at development. In the agricultural field, in particular, it was gradually understood that a better comprehension of these countries' realities was necessary. It was a matter of better observing their farming, in order to provide an answer which was well adapted to the problems which were faced.

One often questions the role played by the research conducted in agricultural economy in this development of attitudes. The aim of this article is to answer this question; it is based on research conducted in French-speaking Africa, the Ivory Coast in particular. We would like to describe how the idea of research devoted to the agricultural economy of countries in the process of development was conceived and the difficulties of carrying out this research. In addition, we would like to show why the autonomy of this research is henceforth an indispensable condition of its impact on development.

THE EMERGENCE OF RESEARCH IN AGRICULTURAL
ECONOMY ADAPTED TO THE PROBLEMS OF
DEVELOPMENT

After the Second World War, the sudden awareness of under-development was accompanied by great confidence in the technical capacities of the modern world to surmount the handicap of feeble agricultural production in under-developed countries. The spectacular successes of agricultural modernisation in the economies of countries undergoing reconstruction helped to increase this confidence. It seems that one wondered little about the real reasons behind this success. Was it a result of the diffusion of good technical models of development available to European farmers, or, rather, the reaction of these farmers to powerful incitations created by a reality of food scarcity, or was it perhaps the consequence of actions taken by the governments concerned?

Confident in the role of technical progress, a model of development based largely on the popularization of new techniques was diffused in Third World countries. This movement resulted in setting up an impressive number of agricultural development projects at all levels. It is now necessary to recognise that a large number of them ended in complete or semi-failure, and it was necessary to explain the cause of these failures.

For example, it was necessary to explain the variation between the results obtained by agricultural research and those obtained by the farmers who had been proposed corresponding innovations. Worse, these deviations were maintained throughout the years and even augmented, thus showing that the proposed model was ill adapted to the logic of the farmers.

This state of affairs was interpreted as the result of a great reticence on the part of the farmers regarding the innovations which were imposed on them, and exposed the conflicts of interest which existed between the different participants in agricultural development: the farmers, the state and its related associations, and exterior financiers.

It took time to respond adequately to these difficulties. They necessitated the formation and gradual mobilisation of specific competences in rural economy. In effect, it is the need for a more complete understanding of the mechanism which governs economic and social phenomena which is at the core of an important development in the activity of the agricultural economy in and around developing countries. This new activity is manifested by a summons for exterior aid, in the form of experts, the formation of national experts, and the progressive organisation of research oriented towards a better understanding of production systems.

Until a relatively recent period, the group of qualified agricultural economists in the developing countries was found at the level of national decision-making, notably in planning. At the same time, experts belonging to financial organisations or to departments of specialised studies completed diagnoses and studies concerning the realisation of operations and developmental projects during relatively short time periods. For at least a dozen years, the agro-economist has been fixed in the function of decision-making or of accompanying studies, related to or even centred on operations of development. In a country like the Ivory Coast, for example, there existed practically no agricultural economists in the structures of development in 1974, whereas they numbered more than 20 in 1982.

Another type of response to the need for agro-economists in developing countries was furnished by foundations (principally Ford and Rockefeller) which favoured the formation of national specialists under the conditions that they attend universities in the developing countries and that they help to create education appropriate to the countries themselves. In East Africa, for example, the cited foundations vigorously

aided the university departments of social sciences and permitted the number of diplomas conferred to increase appreciably. With the passing of a dozen years, one can observe an analogous phenomenon in French-speaking Africa.

The contribution of foreign universities (especially American) was constantly increased, improving at the same time the qualifications of the corps of professors brought to gain a better understanding of the reality of the Third World. Europe is not absent in this movement but its means are relatively feeble and perhaps the specifics of a certain number of its structures oriented towards the developing countries have not always permitted a satisfying response in relation to the importance of the demand.

The economic and social problems of rural development have finally been taken into account in the organisation of the research itself. In international centres, such as the IITA or the ICRISAT, citing only those which intervene in Africa, it had been desired, for example, to integrate the analysis of the systems of production as a frame of reference for the introduction of innovations. In other centres, the contribution of rural economy to the formation of agronomists is considerable.

At the same time, in the restructuring or the development of an apparatus for national research there is also noted a tendency to integrate rural economy. This integration occurs generally by the creation of a central team charged with following and, if possible, anticipating the economic evolution in the agricultural sector and, finally, aiding the orientation of research, through the organisation of regional multi-disciplinary teams centred on the analysis of systems of production. Senegal, in French-speaking Africa, offers a beautiful example of the recent creation of such a device.

Through this brief view of the evolution of the growing place that rural economy takes in decision-making, up to and including the orientation of agronomic research, it can be observed that the required competences depend entirely on aid which comes from the exterior of those countries concerned. The place of the native researchers is still very weak and in the majority of the cases their formation, like those of foreign experts, still depends on the base of knowledge acquired by experience or scientific investigation completed outside their own countries. In this domain, as in many others, the dependence of almost all the developing countries is quasi-total. Even taking the considerable role of North American universities in this process into consideration, one can speak of a preponderant dependence on American education. Briefly, theories, methods, knowledge, ideologies all come from the exterior. It can be imagined, it should even be admitted, that there will only be real development with the existence of an autonomous capacity for analysis and reflection on rural development. This capacity for

reflection in our contemporary world is manifested by the existence of an active research in the social sciences.

DIFFICULTIES IN SETTING UP AUTONOMOUS RESEARCH

The attempts to help construct the potential for national research have been multiplied in the recent past, but they collide with numerous difficulties related to their methods of insertion into the society. Having participated in one of these attempts we would like to try to characterise the circumstances and expose this which, according to us, still opposes full development.

In the Ivory Coast, the birth of research in rural economy was incontestably favoured by the existence of dynamic agricultural and agronomic research. But the research organised in this domain was essentially the result of political will, expressed at the time (1972–8) through a movement toward planning by the Minister of Scientific Research who had wagered on the development of a national structure.

Entering into a general process of reorganisation and of progressive control over all research, the creation and development of CIREs benefited the development of a regulated research worker status and a national finance put it temporarily out of danger of exterior excesses. The choice of programmes had been facilitated by a procedure of confrontation with the principal participants in the development, and their preparation exposed without a doubt the necessity to educate national researchers. Recourse to exterior existence for personnel had been voluntarily reduced to a minimum, but the co-ordination with the potential existing in other structures had been largely favoured. The regular publication of research results in the notebooks of CIREs played a determining role in the evaluation and the diffusion of knowledge. Finally CIREs used all available resources to educate the maximum number of researchers in the shortest space of time, and systematically supported students in various types of economy, putting their studies to work on the land.

Ten years later, CIREs has about 20 researchers of whom half are rural economists. In particular CIREs supports the creation of education at the doctoral level for all of West Africa. However, dependence still exists. It centres essentially on the difficulties faced in adapting research to the realities of development; often, they are aggravated by non-adaptation to the manner of internal administration of research and the multiplicity of forms of exterior intervention in developing countries. In developed countries agronomic research and, particularly, research in rural economy benefit from the incessant movement of ideas which are manifested between the researchers and the many organisations which animate the agricultural world. The translation from perceived needs into research apparatus at the different levels of decision-making is facilitated by the existence of numerous occasions for confrontations between researchers and producers and an improved education which furnishes

the basis for communication. Finally, the multiplicity of interlocutors guarantees free expression, a principal source of efficiency.

In developing countries, the situation is principally characterised by an unequal capacity for expression on the part of those participating in social and economic activity. The researcher often has as his only interlocutor the state and its diverse branches to prepare developmental plans. In the best of cases, such as that which can be observed in the Ivory Coast, the systematic organisation of dialogue between the different decision-making levels of the state and the researchers of different disciplines has been able considerably to improve the possibilities for orientation. But in almost all cases, the absence of opportunities for the farmers to express themselves makes it difficult to take into account fundamental questions of development. In the social sciences there is no really objective scientific approach. The researcher is, himself, a part of the world which he observes and a scientific verification can only be established by examining the variety of behaviours exhibited by the different members of a society. Under these conditions the staging of research in rural economy in a large number of developing countries is confronted by a major handicap; the expression of inequalities related to development. In the majority of cases, this situation is aggravated by the precarious status of the researchers and by insufficient means for research, which explain the feeble recognition of the researchers' social utility and, unfortunately, a certain mistrust which exists. In fact, through his work, the researcher exposes social and economic mechanisms whose explanations can reflect negatively on the interests of the state or on those of individuals and groups with whom he is aligned. Thus, it is necessary to examine problems concerning liberty of expression.

When the public powers recognise the value of efforts made by those who have attempted to construct a national potential for research and when the comprehension of foreign money lenders suffices to authorise a continuation of funds, other obstacles remain to be overcome.

In fact, if this research becomes credible, it is highly probable that solicitations for studies to be completed would be numerous and more alluringly accompanied by comfortable financing. The demand can come from the interior, but still comes more often from the exterior. The young researchers or professors flattered by such a consideration, are trained in a rapid succession of disorganised operations which often only give an illusory understanding of the reality of the country. The young researchers and professors in these operations are only workers in the service of analyses which are exterior to them. Very rare are the situations which permit a study to realise a scientific accumulation which is useful to the development of a programme managed by the institution who employs these researchers.

On the other hand, fearing such compromises, or not at all enjoying the necessary esteem on the part of public powers, a young researcher can rightly consider that his actions should be oriented toward exterior education: the research should support the education, but another

danger threatens him, concerning faulty articulation in development, which extends to a veritable isolation. Isolation which unfortunately characterises numerous universities in the Third World. Isolation which favours the simple repetition by the native researchers themselves of precepts conceived and received from the exterior.

The autonomy of research in developing countries, in rural economy in particular, is therefore very difficult to construct. It demands on the part of its promoters a great clearness of priorities and a great firmness in its management. It is necessary to define programmes which are well articulated to the priorities of development such that they are desired by the country, to construct or develop superior education whose principal priority is to establish this education on an effective knowledge of the country's agriculture and to respond, without letting itself be inundated, to exterior solicitations.

Before these difficulties, international co-operation contents itself with pointed but limited aid. It could be more effective if it undertook, long-term, the support of a defined programme recognised as having priority in the country receiving aid, and if it was careful to favour relations from team to team between northern and southern countries and between the countries of the South themselves.

What are in fact, the faults of international co-operation as it is practised? We notice two principal weaknesses which constitute obstacles to the construction of autonomous and efficient research in developing countries.

First of all, it seems to us that the brevity and inconsistency of aid is opposed to the long period which is necessary for the construction of efficient research. It is necessary to have at least ten years to create an autonomous research team in a completely developed country as well as under the worst conditions. However, it is rare that aid to these research programmes last longer than two, three, at most five years without severe modifications in the origin, the direction and the orientation of the work.

The inadequate formation received by the national researchers causes other problems which are extremely complicated. It would be necessary to create an education which better responds to real needs of the country concerned. How can this be done when the knowledge of these countries is still so weak? On the contrary, all is ready for veritably extroverted research when education, its programmes and financing, is defined by the exterior and often, in spite of the good will of its contributors, to the advantage of the exterior.

CONCLUSION

The experiences of the last two decades show that research in agricultural economy can make a considerable contribution to a country's development. This fact became progressively apparent and necessitated an important evolution in the demand for economic studies in order that it would be clearly established.

The development of autonomous research is necessary. This alone can conveniently integrate the actions of various economic agents. But the development of such a research in rural economy is yet confronted with many difficulties. Some are of internal origin. They will be overcome when rural economics is recognised as necessary for development. Other difficulties are of external origin. They will be resolved when the different international contributors of aid understand that their interest is to support the development and expansion of an autonomous team of native researchers.

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