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Foreword

Earlier versions of the papers in this issue of the *Review of Marketing and Agricultural Economics* were presented at the Development Studies Conference — 'Mechanisms of Socio-Economic Change in Rural Areas' — held at the Australian National University, Canberra, 25-27 November, 1991. This conference was organised as a forum for those persons (particularly in Australia) engaged in the study of rural development in poorer countries. Its aim was to review current theory about mechanisms of socio-economic change in such contexts, to scrutinise empirical applications in the light of that theory, and to draw out implications for development policies.

The Conference was organised around four main themes: (a) the household and village economy; (b) the economics of institutional change; (c) the economics of new technology; and (d) overall planning and the economics of human resource and infrastructure development. Three papers were delivered on each of the first three topics and two papers on the last topic. Each topic entailed a 'lead' paper, discussing basic theoretical aspects, with the remaining 'applied' paper/s devoted to empirical applications of theory. In addition, an introductory paper set the scene for the key problems in, and approaches to, rural improvement, while a concluding paper outlined the chief insights that emerged from the main sessions and canvassed future research thrusts and implications for government policies. These latter two papers have been integrated into an 'Overview' in the present volume, along with some ideas arising from Conference discussion.

At the Conference each paper was followed by comment from an invited discussant (see the Appendix for the Program). On the second day of the Conference a panel of invited speakers (together with audience participation) discussed some key issues associated with the main topic. Unfortunately, space considerations and technical difficulties with recording the panel discussion have pre-

cluded the incorporation of both discussant notes and panel discussion in the present volume of papers. However, the notes are available upon request, and certain aspects of the latter discussion have been included in the 'Overview' paper. We thank the panel members and the discussants for their valuable contributions.

We gratefully acknowledge the sponsorship of our respective universities, the Australian National University and the University of New England, plus the financial assistance of the Society for International Development, the Australian Agricultural Economics Society Inc., the Australian Development Studies Network, the Australian International Development Assistance Bureau (AIDAB) and the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR). Without their help the Conference could not have proceeded. In addition, the Deputy Director General of AIDAB, Dr Peter McCawley, opened the Conference on behalf of Dr R.B. Dun, Director General of AIDAB, while ACIAR provided us with a further grant to assist with the preparation of the conference papers for publication.

Many people were generous with their time and advice in the preparations for the Conference. For this assistance we are most grateful. In particular, we thank Tanya Joce and Ann Martin, as well as other staff in the Department of Economics, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, whose support with the myriad of organisational detail helped to ensure the success of the conference. Finally, but not least, our thanks are expressed to the authors of the invited papers whose contributions set the scene around which the conference proceedings developed.

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and Elaine Treadgold