Journal of Agricultural and Applied Economics, 32,2(August 2000):345–355

What Can Social Scientists Contribute to the Challenges of Rural Economic Development?

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> Practical men who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influence, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. . . . It is ideas, not vested interests, which are dangerous for good or evil.
>
> J.M. Keynes. *The General Theory of Employment Interest and Money*

While this session focuses on the persistence of poverty in the rural South, my paper looks beyond how the research community can be effective in dealing with poverty to how we might better approach rural development. Persistent poverty is clearly a major element of the development dilemma, but the solution to poverty cannot come through transfer programs that support the poor, although they may play a role. It can only come from a broad development initiative that changes the environment in which the rural poor live and provides them with the opportunity to participate in the economy. This is a large task, and it is not one that we should believe will be easily or rapidly accomplished. But despite the odds we have an obligation to society to identify a role for social science research in the process and to carry out that role to the best of our ability.

When TVA Rural Studies was in its early stages and we were trying to identify the type of role we should play in rural development research, one of the directors of TVA said that if we didn't come up with a single new idea ourselves, but found a way to take ideas that were already in existence and make them available to rural leaders, we would have served an extremely useful function. From this suggestion we developed the objective of "providing useful research to rural leaders" as the way to define the role of Rural Studies This has turned out to be a lot harder than we thought for a number of reasons. The obvious reason is that to provide useful research you have to identify the problem that is bothering the leader. However, also implicit in the objective is the assumption that you can actually identify the leaders in the community, but this is often not a simple task nor is getting them to articulate the problems that concern them. It also assumes that all leaders in a given place are worried about the same problem in the same way. Finally, we found that in many cases the problems of greatest interest were ones where we did not have any clear information or advice to provide, because they were new

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Thanks to Betty King and Tom Rowley for some useful suggestions. Ntam Barhanyi provided excellent discussion comments that I have not adequately incorporated here because they appear in his contribution.

problems where no existing body of research was available, because they were problems that had no known solution, or, most commonly, because the potential solutions introduced other problems that were at least as difficult to deal with. A particularly significant aspect of the last situation was the case where the proposed solution was considered to be less politically appealing than the problem, and leaders consequently chose not to use the information made available to them. Over the last five years I have come to the conclusion that it is far easier to talk about being relevant to rural economic development than to actually be relevant. Despite this, I continue to think that we have a responsibility to try to improve conditions in rural areas, even though our likelihood of success is low.

Do We Really Care?

In the introductions and conclusions to many of their papers social scientists are fond of saying that the results of their analysis will be useful to policy makers and to all those who are interested in public policy. In most of these academic claims of importance one usually finds little or no effort to explain how or why the research results are important, nor is there much effort to provide direction for applying the results. So we must conclude that the assertion generally reflects wishful thinking on the authors' parts. Too often we assume that once our work is published in some academic document it will inevitably find its way into political life and the larger world with no further effort on our part. At least for economists the belief may be grounded in the famous quote by Keynes that introduces this paper. Unfortunately should economists and other social scientists seriously want to have some real influence on public policy and business behavior, greater effort is necessary.

Before asking how social scientists[1] can best influence public policy on rural development it is perhaps necessary to first ask whether they have any real incentive to do so. After establishing when it is in their interest to try, we can than move to a discussion of how they might accomplish this goal. Unfortunately, my impression is that in most cases we are less than serious in our efforts to shape rural policy. I think this reflects a number of self-reinforcing factors.

First, most academics have little or no experience of life outside a university. For the most part we tend to have made our way through the educational system with no significant experience in outside activities other than summer work while a student. To be honest, we generally know little about life outside the university in terms of direct experience. Second, the nature of the academic reward system encourages us to write for our peers on subjects that these peers deem to be important, and those subjects are most often things that push back the frontiers of abstract knowledge, not things that help specific communities develop. Thus it is not clear that the current reward structure in academia provides sufficient incentive for a rational individual to make the investment. Finally, when academics do try to engage in "real world" analysis they often encounter a skeptical reaction from people in communities that follows the general form of "those that can do, those that can't teach, so why should we pay any attention to you?" This reaction is driven both by a healthy skepticism of strangers offering advice and, too often, by past experiences with ideas that were not well thought out.

As a result, instead of actually trying to do work that deals with real rural economic development problems, we too often try to legitimize that portion of our work that may not be close enough to the cutting edge of theory by attaching to it a vague statement of its importance to public policy in the hope of getting it published as applied research. The proof of this lies in our inability to clearly articulate why the result is important for public policy or how one should go about implementing the ideas.

I therefore first suggest that we must think

[1] The balance of the paper deals mainly with the work of economists and to a lesser extent sociologists. Other social science disciplines, particularly political science, psychology and anthropology, can and should surely play an important role in enhancing rural development, but historically it has been economics and sociology that have had the greatest focus on rural development issues in the developed economies.

seriously about whether we really are interested in being engaged in changing the world before we embark on a discussion of how to go about doing it. It seems to me that in many cases we really aren't. The nature of an academic position encourages a degree of detachment from "normal life." Well-recognized phrases such as "ivory tower" and "the separation of town and gown" reflect reality for most university faculty. Even in the Land Grant Universities where we continue to acknowledge our responsibility to the larger society, there is little support for active involvement of faculty in public policy issues outside of those who work in colleges of agriculture, and often only token support even within them. While academics like to speak of doing relevant work their criterion for judging relevance is the endorsement of peers. In the promotion and tenure maze this means that work that is deemed worthy of journal publication is relevant, while work that involves a straightforward application of known principles seldom meets the standard. Unfortunately it is precisely the application of known principles to specific places that typically results in the greatest economic development success. As Glenn Pulver and Ron Shaffer have long said, the correct way to do rural economic development is one county (place or community) at a time.

Notions of academic freedom also raise their head in this consideration. One of the great privileges of being at a university is the right to choose those topics you will work on. By contrast, engaging in an effort to bring about economic development means accepting that you must work on those topics that have the best hope of effectuating change in the community. These are rarely identical issues. Recently I sat in room with a group of researchers who had joined together because of a sincere belief that their modeling work could be useful to communities interested in rural development. They truly wanted to provide useful analysis to community groups and recognized that doing this meant forming partnerships with community associations. However, once the group members realized that formalizing a partnership would entail accepting the obligation to do work that was not driven strictly by the direct interests of the individual researchers, but was defined to significant degree by the community partners, there was a lot less enthusiasm for the idea.

Those who labor in government agencies face a somewhat different set of incentives, but in most cases the result is the same. In government the rewards from publication are not as strong and there is considerable nominal pressure to be involved in actions that support the broad public policies currently in effect. However the rewards in government too often come from defending policies whether they work or not. In a large hierarchical organization there is considerable pressure to ensure that analysis supports the position held by the leaders of the organization and contradictory opinions are seldom enthusiastically welcomed, nor are they disseminated. In a government agency there is nothing that corresponds to academic freedom either in terms of the choice of work or the ability to rely on the organization to allow the results to be published. The reward structure in government agencies comes form moving up the administrative ladder and increasing the number of people under your supervision, not from generating innovative ideas. Thus, advancement comes from supporting the system, not criticizing it. Further, like their academic counterparts, government social scientists typically do not have strong entrepreneurial attitudes and firmly embrace the social science traditions of observation and analysis, not involvement. Finally, if we truly believe that development is a bottom-up process then most social scientists in federal and state agencies are not well positioned to be engaged in implementation. However, they are somewhat better placed than academics to come into contact with politicians on a daily basis. But even here the simple nature of the hierarchy keeps most civil servants well away from frequent contact with the legislature.

If We Truly Care, What Should We Do?

Suppose for now that there is some group of social scientists who are interested in making

contributions to the challenges of rural economic development. How might they best contribute? If we are to be serious about providing support to those who are more directly engaged in rural development we have to think about the types of functions we can best serve. One role is certainly the generation of new ideas and this is where Keynes' quote is most applicable. The traditional advantage of an independent university career is the right, and perhaps the responsibility, to come up with new ideas that may not at first glance seem practical. We certainly should not ignore this function, but as Keynes correctly points out it is the "defunct economist," not the current one, whose ideas have influence. This suggests that we want to make a difference in our lifetime then we must explore ways to allow our ideas and analysis to more rapidly play a role in the decisions of government and business.

One obvious way to do this is to leave the university and engage in helping a government or firm as a provider of policy analysis, but doing this inevitably raises problems of capture. When you work for someone, or some organization, it is too easy to frame questions and responses in a way that address the interests of that person or organization, rather than society at large. I recognize that this is not a path that many will choose to follow, nor is it one that many of us are suited for. My belief is that the fundamental nature of the personalities of those who become academic social scientists makes them more comfortable observing, evaluating, synthesizing and recommending than in being directly engaged in implementing development projects.[2] And our professional training reinforces these tendencies. We learn early on that we should not make value judgments and that good research designs require detachment so the observer does not contaminate the results. Unfortunately being engaged in carrying out rural development entails violating these precepts.

As a result, most of us will continue to try to influence rural development while remaining at a university. While this clearly limits the types and speed of the impacts we can have, I do not minimize the value of trying to make things better. I offer the following list of tasks in the hope that some of you will find ways to provide ideas that can address the problems and further present these ideas in a way that they can be of use to rural people and places.

The Work To Be Done

Analytical Issues

1. *Describing Rural Places.* One area that I think is tremendously important involves developing a better taxonomy of rural places. We need to find a way to group places into a manageable number of categories that have some clear association with stages or paths of development. We talk about the diversity of rural places and as a result we know that any single rural policy is not going to work well in the vast majority of places because it does not deal with their conditions. However, we should also understand that a government can only operate some small set of policies, and so saying that each place is unique and has to develop its own solution is essentially saying their can be no effective public policy for rural economic development.

It seems to me that this is the wrong message; what we should be searching for are ways to link a limited a number of policies with diverse rural conditions. Developing a useful taxonomy is important if we are to accomplish this goal. We should be able to say this group of places is alike because of these characteristics and it differs from another group of places that are in turn alike because of those characteristics. Ideally the characteristics then become the means for identifying different policy regimes that can be applied to specific groups.

While we have many unidimensional scales, including the various USDA ERS categories (Beale codes, economic specialization categories, policy categories), the EDA func-

[2] I do note that the cooperative extension service has traditionally provided a way to carry out a sort of direct engagement while providing a protective buffer in the form of public employment.

tional economic units and a host of specialized categories, I believe we should be investing more effort in trying to develop multi-dimensional scales that are useful for targeting policy. I have no specific suggestion for doing this but until we can demonstrate some understanding of why places close to each other are significantly different in their development experience I think we will be largely ineffective in identifying meaningful economic development policies.

While taxonomies may seem unimportant, they provide the essential first step in developing policies. We know that a single policy is ineffective because rural conditions are so diverse, but we should also know that we cannot have a policy for every place. This means that if we are to develop a small enough number of rural policies to be administratively manageable, we must have some rules for grouping places into groups that could benefit from certain policies but not others, and this is where a taxonomy is required.

2. *Employment Opportunities and Constraints.* It seems that we have not paid enough attention to employment. Economists tend to focus on businesses and not workers, and my limited understanding of rural sociology suggests it focuses on families and communities and not jobs. We are fond of saying that job creation should not be the *raison d'etre* for rural development policy. However, while jobs, like money, aren't everything, they are the main thing. If there is little or no employment opportunity there will soon be no community, and while there are good jobs and bad jobs, the alternative of no jobs is worse. One of my favorite quotes in this regard comes from a Republican member of the Florida legislature, Bill Posey, who neatly summed up the essence of the problem stating, "Unless people are independently wealthy, they are going to work, they're going on welfare, or they're going to steal. There are no other alternatives."

I think that in our research we too often miss making a strong enough link between poverty and employment. Were we to focus on employment opportunities instead of poverty we would subtly reposition the debate from the perspective of discussing disadvantage to one where we search for and identify opportunity. In a purely rational world this should not be an important distinction because in both cases it is the same group of people who have the same set of resources. But in practice it makes a big difference because the issues can be more easily framed in terms of increasing productivity, enhancing resource use, and increasing aggregate output, instead of on redistributing resources from the successful to the unsuccessful. In other words, while the same amount of money may have to flow, in one case it can be cast as an investment while in the other it is more likely to be seen as a transfer payment.

Increasing employment may not alleviate poverty problems, but I believe it is the place to start, if only because it can reduce the cost of income support. I also think that one of the things that contributes to our limited acceptance in rural communities is our unwillingness to deal with the importance of jobs. Rural people and leaders place a greater emphasis on the availability of jobs for all segments of the local labor force than we often consider to be important, and if we disparage employment as a measure of the success of rural development programs we can be seen by them as inconsequential.

I don't think we have a very good understanding of rural labor markets in terms of the supply of labor, the demand for labor, or whether and how these markets clear. We should be developing better information on such issues as how welfare reform affects rural labor markets, the extent to which the availability of health insurance and other benefits are more important than the wage level in attracting job applicants, the actual geographic size of rural labor markets, the existence of skills gaps and how to address them, the relationship between market employment and the barter economy, job discovery mechanisms in rural areas, and the prevalence of "company towns."

3. *Policy Functions and Impacts.* We all now recognize that there is no real federal rural development policy other than assistance to agriculture. However we are less able to

accept that there never will be a meaningful federal rural development policy. While there may have been an opportunity in 1990 following the farm financial crisis which focused attention on rural America for a brief interval, that moment has passed and each year reduces the chances of its ever returning. Multiple factors make this so. The obvious one is the current effort to trim the role of the federal government in almost all forms of domestic economic and social policy. As long as the political climate favors market forces and the devolution of responsibility to states there will be no new major federal public policy initiatives. A second factor is that the rural problem has been mitigated to a great degree by prosperity in some rural places and out-migration in others. The diversity of rural America applies to economic development as well as other measures. Rural poverty has been greatly reduced from the levels seen in the 1960s making the case for major national initiative more difficult. The rural problems that remain are arguably not national issues, but regional, state or local. Finally the economic development of rural America is increasingly irrelevant to suburban America. The principal economic functions of rural areas (extractive industries and simple manufacturing) are a smaller share of GDP, and globalization makes it possible to obtain many of these goods and services at lower prices from other countries. Also, as the urban and suburban population grows, rural American's political influence in the federal government and in state legislatures declines (Stauber).

For social scientists interested in rural development, there is an obligation to provide information on how specific policies affect rural places and to suggest how policy can be modified to maintain urban benefits without harming rural areas. Despite the increased likelihood that federal and state policy will not consider rural development we cannot ignore it and only focus on local government. Given the separation of powers in the Constitution, local governments only have derivative powers and so it is the state and federal legislatures that have the real say in influencing economic events.

While there may not be much legislation that has a specific rural focus, this does not mean that state and federal policy will not affect rural places. Both national and state policy will continue to affect the economic development of rural areas, but the policies will be formed with little or no concern for the types of impacts they will have on rural economic conditions. Legislatures develop policy in response to where votes and money are concentrated and increasingly this is the suburbs. While suburban residents have an interest in rural areas it is not necessarily compatible with economic development (Swanson and Freshwater). This means that *preservation* is more likely to be the watchword than *development.* Suburbanites tend to see rural areas as repositories of the national culture, history and stock of wildlife—all of which must be preserved.

Here social scientists can help make the argument to suburban interests that some balance of outcomes is important to preserve equity, and that rural areas cannot be simply held hostage to a desire to preserve a vision of an idyllic past at the expense of the current rural population (Lapping and Pfeffer). Doing this will not be easy because it will entail finding ways to be engaged in the legislative process early on before firm positions are taken and it involves challenging important cultural myths that are widely held by both urban and rural people. The only way this can happen is if social scientists are willing to participate in hearings and work with legislative staff. It also requires developing strong personal relationships with politicians. To do this successfully requires making a strong commitment of time, and perhaps money, to political campaigns that most of us would probably rather avoid. However, sending unsolicited policy briefs to legislators, no matter how well they are crafted, is not going to make much difference once decisions have been made.

Another important role that social scientists will have to play in rural policy discussions is a steady reminder that bringing about change in rural conditions is a long-term task. Political support is typically based upon expectations of fast responses that can be clearly as-

sociated with the decision to implement a specific decision or policy. Development by contrast is a slow process that even when detected cannot be attributed to any single specific event. We must continue to make the argument that many of those areas that are lagging behind the nation have been doing so for an extended period of time so it is only logical to expect that it will take time to improve conditions and that the history of quick fixes has been unsuccessful.

4. *Realistic Models.* Social scientists, particularly economists, rely heavily upon models as the means to carry out their work. Models are important because they are an important way for us to demonstrate the existence of problems and the potential of solutions. As government becomes more skeptical, because of a long history of policies and programs that promised results but failed to deliver them, models become an even more important means to convince policymakers that there is firm analysis underlying policy recommendations.

However, over time as theories and techniques have developed, the models we use have become more complex. The increase in complexity is a two-edged sword. On the one hand more complex models can in principle better describe behavior and allow us to develop a more refined understanding of the phenomena we are examining. On the other hand more complex models usually require data that has more refined measurement concepts and that has fewer measurement and definitional problems. In our research we have usually chosen sophistication and elegance over robustness in our models because this has been the type of work that gets published, but a consequence has been that our models are less capable of answering development questions because the underlying assumptions don't hold or the data to estimate them doesn't exist. Further, more complex models are harder to explain, harder to implement, generally not statistically robust and suggest that policy success depends upon being able to amass sufficient resources to alter multiple variables simultaneously.

To a great extent data problems are something we have chosen not to worry about. The presumption is that if the data is published by a reputable source, such as the federal government, the concepts must be appropriate and the numbers must capture what we want to measure in our models. However we are increasingly faced with data facts we cannot ignore. As our theories drive us to more sophisticated models of small area economies and groups, we concurrently face the dilemma that the federal government is increasingly less interested in collecting the data to support the models. A reduced federal role in rural development, coupled with increasingly sophisticated sampling approaches, allows federal policy to be implemented with less data both in terms of the actual indicators collected and in terms of sub-state observations. However, this approach leaves those interested in sub-state analysis with very little to work with. In particular, rural areas are woefully under-sampled in many surveys, especially those that deal with people and not commodities. This may mean we will soon have to choose between simple, but conceptually inaccurate, models that can be estimated using available data, or more complex models that are consistent with received theory but are not really operational because the appropriate data does not exist. Certainly primary data collection remains a possibility for resolving this dilemma, but even if the cost of collection can be overcome we still have only one snapshot of a particular place at a particular point in time which leaves us with little room for generalization.

5. *The Role of the Internet and E-commerce.* Perhaps the Internet will not change the world as much as its proponents suggest, but it will certainly result in significant change. The Internet may not have as big an impact as the industrial revolution, electricity, the railroad or automobiles, but it is changing the way firms do business, governments operate, and individuals and groups maintain social relations. To date it is not clear that rural areas have been greatly disadvantaged by the changes, and some would argue that telecommunications is the best hope to eliminate distance–one of the main rural disadvantages. Adoption rates of computers and other ad-

vanced telecommunication methods in rural areas have been comparable to those in urban places, primarily because farmers have been quick to use the technology. However, rural areas had high initial adoption rates for electricity and telephones in the early part of the twentieth century, but then as the technology advanced it was in directions that favored urban locations not rural and rural residents fell behind.

Most rural residents, if they have the resources to have a telephone, computer and ISP account, can now get reasonable Internet access, but as the technology moves on to higher bandwidth applications that require advanced telephone central switches, ADSL, cable modems and fiber optics it is unlikely that there will be sufficient effective demand in most rural places to allow people to fully participate. Similarly e-commerce offers a way for small rural firms to tap into larger urban markets, as long as UPS or Federal Express serve their community, and this offers clear opportunities for small businesses. However, e-commerce also allows large national firms to steal business from local firms. While communities fight over the desirability of a Wal-mart, they ignore the potential of an out-of-state e-commerce venture, such as Amazon.com or e-toys.com serving the community and providing no local employment and no local tax revenue.

6. *Globalization.* The effects of globalization are obvious to virtually all rural residents. Arguably, rural areas are more affected by globalization than are urban places because their economies have a far higher proportion of tradable goods and services. In addition, many of these goods and services are concentrated in less-complex products that involve a high proportion of unskilled labor. This makes rural areas more susceptible to competition from developing countries. Other aspects of the rural economy parallel the economies of developing nations. These include lower levels of education among the populace, weak business and financial institutions, political processes that are neither transparent nor honest, and inadequate infrastructure.

In a real sense the development problem of most rural areas in the United States can be seen as a struggle to move out of competition with the third world and into a position where rural residents can compete with the urban areas of the industrial world. At present it seems that there are two groups interested in development work, those with a focus on domestic issues and those who deal with other countries and there is little recognition that the groups are concerned with linked problems. If this is the case then we should be making stronger links between the theories and practices that are used in the developing world and our domestic rural development analysis. We should also be making more urban and rural comparative studies that would help to establish where rural places are in the development continuum and who their competition is.

Implementation Issues

Beyond the set of analytical tasks that I believe social scientists should examine there are a number of other things that I believe are important to consider if we are to contribute to rural economic development. I group these points under a general title of *Implementation Issues* because they deal with how we behave rather than what we do.

1. *Initiating Contact.* The first item in the list deals with the importance of identifying potential "customers" for social science analysis. If we continue to believe in bottom-up development strategies and local control then we have to find a way to identify local leaders and work with them. If we believe that state and federal governments will continue to play a "top down" role then we should be finding ways to deal with both elected officials and the people who work for them. Potential users of social science research are more likely to actually do something with our work if they are part of the research design and follow the analysis through to its conclusions than if they are presented with a report that is supposedly helpful. One strategy is to use advisory committees made up of potential users and to actually have them provide advice rather than serve only a ceremonial function.

Because rural leaders have a high "burn-

out rate" it is important to have a broad set of contacts. While it is easier to work with a small group of people, attrition from lost elections, job relocations and altered priorities can reduce a small group to one or two people fairly quickly. This means that a significant portion of our time has to be spent cultivating new leaders and developing their skills. Although a situation where you work one-on-one with an individual may be ideal in terms of developing tailored analysis, such a strategy is high in cost and unlikely to result in much change. So we will have to find innovative ways to work with groups within communities and with groups of communities in ways that minimize the time spent on "process activity" to allow more energy to go to accomplishing tasks.

2. *Include Agriculture in Rural Development.* This is a problem that should have long ago been laid to rest but it continues to resurface. Unfortunately it has also led to a polarization among rural interests. While it is true that there is far more to rural America than agriculture and that most rural Americans are no more dependent on farming than is the urban population, it is also true that you cannot define an operational rural development strategy in most parts of North America that does not have an agricultural component. Agriculture still matters but it matters in a different way–it is the people and the land resource that are important, not the commodities these people produce. Because farming remains the single largest use of rural land and farmers control much of the wealth in rural areas they cannot, and should not, be ignored.

We can learn much from the agricultural development model that has served U.S agriculture this century, including its focus on developing leadership, its ability to get broad-based support, and its recognition of the importance of keeping up with technological change. One reason that farmers have been able to maintain their position of power is that they have invested in developing effective leaders and in defining goals. It is unlikely that the federal government will invest in helping the rest of America develop this capacity, as it did for farmers, but if agriculture can be made an integral part of rural development it may be possible to use the existing capacity of farm organizations to help develop broader local leadership.

3. *Learn from the Models of Others.* While social scientists give lip service to the benefits of interdisciplinary activity they tend not to pay much attention to ideas that originate outside their field of expertise. Sociologists tend to see the world in terms of communities and think about how you foster collective action. The model assumes that with some effort a consensus can be achieved and that everyone will move forward together. In economists' terms it suggests that individuals' utility functions are similar and not rival, so you can get Pareto improvements (your gain will leave me no worse off and it may make me better off). By contrast, economists view the world in terms of individual decisions and assume any discussion of the public interest is only strategic behavior driven by disguised self-interest. For them, individual utility functions are independent, which makes me at best indifferent to changes in your wellbeing and possibly opposed to it if I see your gain as decreasing my relative advantage.

Both these models are flawed because most people behave somewhere in the middle. There are many cases where you can't form a consensus, and there are many other cases where people act in ways that enhance collective wellbeing while clearly making themselves worse off (people who jump into rivers to save strangers from drowning and then die themselves). One result of these differences in approach is that economists tend to work with the "winners" in rural areas because they have the resources and the political power (for example they continue to see rural mainly in terms of farming because that is the constituency with the money). They also tend to work with these people individually or in small informal groups.

By contrast, sociologists are more likely to work with marginal groups to try to establish formal organizations that have a structure, in part because the only way these people can generate influence is by acting collectively (individually they are weak) Sociologists are also

more likely to see the development problem in terms of building collaborative action, instead of individual choice. These differences lead to a number of tensions between the two disciplines. Sociologists are involved in community development, economists in economic development; economists see little meaningful distinction between growth and development as concepts; economists focus on individual decisions and their motivations, while sociologists focus on groups (family, community, organization). We tend to ignore or challenge each other's models and when we talk there is always a degree of skepticism about the value of each other's work.

Conclusion

It is tempting at this point to conclude by saying there is much that social scientists can do to contribute to the challenge of rural development, but that is not the point. The real issue is whether we will have the will to actually make the contribution and whether we will have the sense to do so in a way that enables people to actually use the ideas we produce.

As in all things, there is no free lunch and our traditions as academics make the costs of truly engaging in rural development clear. It entails giving up research that is driven by peer evaluation and endorsement for research that is driven by communities and local leaders. It entails trying to find people to work with and then spending time convincing them they should take our advice. It entails becoming a participant instead of an observer. And it entails spending more time away from a university than many of us want to do.

I also question whether we will make adequate investments in communication and dissemination. Recall the TVA director who observed that the real need was not for more research, but for better communication. To do this requires taking about half your budget and spending it on things that do not push back the frontiers of knowledge, including identifying the market or audience, learning what they are interested in and how they like to receive information, and then delivering it to them in that format. What we usually do is "dumb-down" a journal article, staple it between two boring covers and put it on the shelf marked "Extension Series Publications." We don't value it, so why should anyone else?

The best publication I can think of that effectively communicates with a non-social scientist audience about rural development is *Rural Development Perspectives.* It is effective because it repackages research results in a fairly attractive format that people can pick up and read and get the main point quickly. While our professional associations seem to have grasped the value of this type of publication, I am not sure that we have really made the commitment to rewrite our research and package it properly. At the moment we seem to think that simply taking out the equations will be enough.

Yet without a real effort to serve the audience the best research in the world takes so long to be discovered that it is of limited use. Remember Keynes "defunct economist" whose influence is unknown except to historians of his or her discipline. If we want to influence change in our lifetime we have to make investments in marketing, editing and design that may seem frivolous by our normal peer-based standards but are essential to capture and hold the attention of the people we want to notice our work.

The last concern I have is that we recognize our limitations. We have to be realistic in our expectations of success–there may never be a rural development initiative at the federal or even state level, even though that is our dream. We all want to influence national policy because that is where we expect to receive the biggest bang and the greatest recognition. In reality we are more likely to find ourselves working at the local level. There the government and local populace will always be concerned with development issues so there is a natural clientele, but it is not one that brings national fame, nor is it one that is easy to touch. Because this is rural development they are a long way away in terms of physical distance and often in terms of values, as well as being busy and engaged in activities that often don't mesh with academic sensibilities. Ultimately we can only make a difference to a

small group of people, and that may not be enough to make most of us want to try. So I conclude by hoping that social scientists will try to influence rural development, but I do not have great expectations that many will heed the call.

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