RURAL CHANGE

The Challenge for Agricultural Economists

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Rural Development Programmes and Impoverishment: Some Experiences in Tropical Africa

I am very grateful for this opportunity to air some problems with external intervention in rural development in tropical Africa that have been concerning me recently. These problems are not new to those working in rural development in Africa in different capacities. What is worrying is that despite considerable evidence and even public recognition of these problems, programmes continue to be pursued as if the problems did not exist.

It seems to me important that we agricultural economists involved in rural development in Africa stop to think more seriously about what it is that we are doing. I think we need to recognize that not only may we not be achieving as much as we would like, but we may also be doing considerable damage. An analysis of external intervention in rural development in tropical Africa raises the question, for me, of whether rural development intervention can succeed in alleviating poverty. It raises the possibility that rural development intervention cannot provide a solution. However, I do not think we yet have grounds for serious pessimism. We do not yet have evidence that rural development can succeed. I believe that if we face up to the problems we may yet be able to devise different sorts of strategies that can succeed both in raising production and incomes in the aggregate and in raising the incomes of the rural poor. This requires a different approach, however, from that currently being pursued by the majority of those involved in rural development intervention. In the first place it requires a different analysis. If we begin with an analysis of interest group conflicts and then devise and analyse strategies with these in mind, we will be able to explore the possibility of following rural development strategies that take account of conflicts through a process of bargaining, compromise and explicit concession to groups that normally lose out. The challenge is to try to face up to conflicts of interest and to see if we can develop a more successful strategy from that. I would expect such an attempt to result in some programmes in which interests strongly represented at present are still satisfied but those normally left out are also catered for. In other situations, I would expect there to be more fundamental conflicts, in which case the only solution would be a bargained solution in which a share of the gains went to the underprivileged but only at the expense of those accustomed to appropriating all of the gains to themselves. Until there is a serious attempt to see what is possible through an approach based on conflict analysis, I think we can remain optimistic, or at the very least agnostic. Only when such an attempt is shown to have failed will there be real grounds for pessimism.

A group of us who had been working in East Africa and West Africa met at a workshop in 1977 with some of the following questions in mind. Why does external intervention fail again and again? In what sense does it fail? Is there any solution? The workshop has been followed up in a book to be published next year.[1] We are concerned about the adverse effects of external intervention in rural development in Africa, defining external intervention as intervention from outside the rural areas, usually by government or international agencies. We are concerned with what many of us see as an experience of repeated failure, either a failure to alleviate poverty among lower income groups, or an outright failure to achieve even the primary goals of the programmes and projects. Some of the experiences with which we are dealing can only be explained as examples of gross ineptitude involving failure by almost any criterion. In other cases, the failures represent conflicts between different interest groups, with the poor often the losers as a result of "rural development". The conclusions that emerge from our examination of the record in different East and West African countries over the past few decades are depressing, suggesting that there may be fundamental contradictions in the process of rural development. Some of us are now questioning whether there can be a rural development solution that alleviates poverty at all.

REPETITION OF GROSS FAILURE IN LARGE SCALE PROJECTS

One of the things that comes across very clearly is that mistakes of a very simple and fundamental kind have been repeated, in different contexts, time and time again in Africa over the past few decades, and that such mistakes are still being repeated on a large scale in the 1970s.

The mistakes that concern us, because they are still being repeated, are very fundamental mistakes, such as those now familiar as a result of the groundnuts scheme in Tanganyika after the second world war. I use this example deliberately because it is so well known. It has often been said that the groundnuts scheme was an expensive lesson, but that it served at least to ensure that such basic mistakes would not be repeated. Apparently this is not so. Very similar mistakes are continuing to be made even in the 1970s.

Coulson[2] summarizes mistakes for which the groundnuts scheme is famous as: inadequate surveys of soil and rainfall conditions; untried mechanical equipment; inadequate provision for spare parts and maintenance; insufficient attention paid to known groundnuts disease problems; inadequate investigation of headquarters' water supplies; and finally an inability to accept failure until well over a year after it was obvious to all technicians in the field. The groundnuts scheme provides us with an example that is all the more disturbing because, in Coulson's words, "The most experienced agricultural officers in Tanganyika were involved in this project, and yet, of these seven reasons for failure, five were agricultural considerations of a most elementary kind".

Coulson's paper suggests that equally basic mistakes were behind the failure of Tanzanian settlement schemes tried between 1964 and 1966, the Tanzanian State farms programme launched in 1969, and even *ujamaa*. Other examples include Kenya settlement schemes of the early 1960s, some of which failed on very fundamental technical grounds; the 1965 Senegal River irrigation development described by Adams;[3] and Ghanaian State farms in the early 1960s reviewed by Beckman.[4] Forrest[5] suggests a record of repetition of failure in Nigeria comparable to Coulson's account of what happened in Tanzania. In Nigeria, the record starts with the Niger Agricultural Project "which managed to replicate the disastrous experience of the Tanganyika groundnuts schemes though on a smaller scale", and it continues through settlement schemes and mechanized food farms in the 1950s, farm settlements in the 1960s, and now through the huge programme of irrigation development of the 1970s. The 1970s irrigation programme provides us with striking evidence that large scale projects are still being pursued on the basis of grossly miscalculated initial assumptions. Wallace[6] summarizes the problems of the Kano River Project in Northern Nigeria in its early stages in 1976/77, as follows:

> Firstly there is an acute shortage of manpower in Nigeria in irrigation, second there is a lack of commitment of Nigerian and expatriate salaried staff to rural employment, thirdly the government has a shortfall of necessary inputs which means that the provision of vital services and inputs cannot be guaranteed. Even if the inputs are available the government sector is plagued with inefficiencies in areas such as transportation, close supervision of distribution of inputs and the provision of tractor services. Finally, the problems facing any bureaucracy in a changing situation are that it is a relatively inflexible institution, capable of responding only slowly to change.

Thus, tractors do not plough on time; irrigation water supply is erratic, lack of spare parts causes delays in repairing pumps, vehicles and tractors, which are also affected by shortages of petrol and diesel; there are limited supplies of fertilizer; and there are major shortages of both unskilled labour and managerial staff for the project. Much of this could be a description of what went wrong with the groundnuts scheme. What is new is the underestimation of shortages of labour and managerial resources. Over-optimistic projections of labour availability are all too familiar to those working on rural development in Africa. They commonly arise from assumptions that labour is plentiful and will always be forthcoming for the family farm or at the "going wage" however low this may be. In the planning of the Kano River Project, the analysis of labour availability was based on mistaken assumptions, that had already been seriously challenged at the time the project was being designed. As so often happens, relevant evidence available locally was ignored by those responsible for the project design.

Why do such fundamental mistakes continue to be made? Why do those involved fail to learn from past experience? If it is not possible to do any better, why do such large schemes continue to be supported? One explanation of the repetition of mistakes lies in the hurried planning of large scale projects. Forrest gives an interesting example, the Anchau scheme in Nigeria, started in 1937 where "thorough preliminary work" and "integrated effort over a period of ten years" was thought to have made for a relatively successful large scale settlement project. The thorough and lengthy process of investigation and development may well have contributed to the project's success, although it is not clear that it was the only important factor, but one wonders whether the project would have appeared justified if the costs involved in such a process of planning and preparation had been included in an evaluation.

Another possible explanation for the repetition of failure lies in the career structures of those involved. Project planning tends to be in the hands of relatively young and inexperienced personnel who may not have been sufficiently exposed to the lessons of past experience. One might ask: why not? The lessons are not difficult to pass on. Moreover, this explanation does not apply to the groundnuts scheme where the complaint was precisely that such fundamental mistakes had been made by "the most experienced technical officers" in the colonial agricultural service at the time.

What seems more likely is that the explanation lies in the impossibility of designing a successful large scale project in the conditions that exist in much of rural tropical Africa at present. Large scale intervention has to be planned in the presence of too many unknowns. Furthermore, it is being undertaken in situations in which large scale projects are inappropriate. The cost of obtaining information on the basis of which one could plan with confidence is often prohibitive and the time involved is often considered too long. Moreover, these large scale interventions require large inputs of managerial and organisational resources that are scarce, they require support from well developed marketing and other institutions, and they make substantial demands on imported or locally produced inputs that are both expensive and scarce. Large scale agricultural projects are not usually of sufficiently high priority to warrant the diversion of scarce resources to the extent necessary to make them a success. However, there are alternatives that are much less expensive. There is enough experience in tropical Africa of rapid and successful growth of marketed output from small producers already operating. This provides us with a real alternative to the large scale projects that appear to have been so repeatedly unsuccessful in rural African conditions.

Large scale projects continue to be supported nevertheless. Those responsible prefer large scale projects because they are visible, relatively self-contained, they can be implemented in conditions in which participants can be controlled, and they provide relatively secure mechanisms for the extraction of surpluses and the generation of financial flows which ensure the repayment of the loans involved. The alternatives are much harder to define, they involve more difficult relationships with existing institutions and groups of producers, and they make both the extraction of surpluses and the generation of financial returns unsure.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST, RURAL POVERTY AND THE RURAL FOOD PROBLEM

The evidence of gross failure in large scale schemes which appear to be doing so little to alleviate poverty and may indeed be increasing it is disturbing. Equally disturbing is the growing body of evidence suggesting that external intervention in rural development in tropical Africa is exacerbating poverty and famine more generally. Not only do the patently unsuccessful projects not succeed on their own terms, but these and many apparently much more successful interventions are having secondary effects that increase poverty and famine over a wider front. One of the commonest ways in which this occurs is through a decrease in the availability of food in the rural areas affected. Thus, the promotion of large scale capitalist rice farming in northern Ghana which is designed to improve the food situation in the towns, displaces traditional rural food production and encourages what food there is to flow out through newly developed marketing channels to urban areas. Serious rural food shortages and famine that are reported from this area for the first time are linked to these developments. Large scale irrigated wheat production in Nigeria does not appear likely to be very successful in meeting the urban wheat demand, but it alters income earning opportunities in the rural areas in such a way that rural food suppliers are threatened. Less radical interventions like the introduction of credit, fertilizers, or new crop varieties to existing rural producers accentuate the trends towards increasing poverty and food deprivation less obviously than in the case of the more radical interventions; but these trends are no less severe for being less obvious. The records of colonial governments that have often been accused of an excessive preoccupation with local food supplies may look good when compared with the widespread neglect of the basic food needs of the rural poor in tropical Africa today.

There is a naive view, still dominant in the African context, that rural development is in the interests of everyone concerned. This view is represented by statements such as "We are all interested in the common fight against rural poverty . . ." and "Rural development is our highest priority because the rural areas are where the majority of the poor live".

There is an assumption that development that raises income in an area raises the income of everyone in the area, certainly the incomes of the majority, and usually the incomes of the poor. Rural development projects are located in areas where there is widespread poverty in the belief that they will benefit large numbers of poor people simply by virtue of the fact that they are located in areas where large numbers of poor live. Thus, highland cash crop developments are justified on the grounds that two-thirds of the population live in highland areas when it is clear that only a very small proportion of people in those areas is at all likely to benefit. A credit project involving only a handful of farmers is justified on the grounds that it is in an area of great poverty. Similar arguments are put forward in support of fertilizer projects. There is astonishingly little recognition in rural development interventions in Africa of the possibility of differential impact among those living in the areas in which the interventions are located. A simple trickle-down analysis may be behind such lack of recognition, but there is enough evidence now for this analysis to be taken for granted no longer. The possibility of conflicts of interest involving a deterioration in the position of the very poor has to be considered more explicitly than it often is at the moment. To ignore conflicts of interest can be extremely damaging; it can encourage the wrong sorts of interventions; it can give a false impression that poverty is being tackled through rural development; and it can make it easier for intervention that is against the interests of the poor.

The fact that rural development interventions have differential impacts on different sections of the African rural population is hardly surprising. Heyer, Roberts and Williams[7] point out that "*the* rural development problem" tends to be seen in very general terms as *one* problem with essentially one solution. The solution is to get rural producers more involved in market production, by which is meant specifically production for urban and international markets. Thus, rural development programmes focus on the production of wheat or rice for the urban market, or the production of tea, cocoa or coffee for export, but seldom on augmenting the production of food for consumption within the rural areas concerned. It is assumed that subsistence consumption will take care of itself, either because production for the market can be grafted on to subsistence production without affecting it adversely, as appears to have been possible in Ghana and Nigeria earlier in the twentieth century, (although Berry[8] has an alternative view on this) or because the increase in marketing output will more than compensate, enabling producers to satisfy their subsistence needs at a more generous level through the market, as is often assumed in East Africa. All of this ignores the fact that while rural producers may gain in the aggregate, substantial groups may lose out. Aggregate increases in, say, wheat production may represent substantial increases in aggregate incomes which will more than enable rural producers to maintain consumption levels in the aggregate. However, these increases are likely to represent losses for some groups and disproportionate gains for others. It seems that as often as not the poor lose when production for the market replaces local food production without any parallel development to counter adverse effects on the local food situation in tropical African conditions at present.

There are many indirect effects of increasing participation in market exchange that tend to get ignored in the practice of rural development. One of the more obvious is the effect on the redistribution of assets, particularly land. Land concentration is often associated with intervention in rural development as one might expect. It appears to be occurring as a result of the Mumias sugar development in Kenya;[9] in northern Ghana;[10] and in central Kenya as a result of the growth of marketed output in the 1960s and 1970s.[11] Less well recognized is the fact that the development and restructuring of produce markets resulting in substantial changes in the size and direction of produce flows can be very damaging to some groups in the rural population. This has been the case in northern Ghana. It also seems likely in the case of the Kano River Project, and it has long been recognized as a danger in areas of smallholder cash crop development in Africa. The adverse effects of changes of market opportunities are beginning to be recognized more widely, as is clear from the work of Sen and others on famine,[12] but it is seldom explicitly discussed in connection with the planning and implementation of rural development interventions.

Failure to look even cursorily at the secondary effects can be responsible for the neglect of serious problems that could often be tackled if acknowledged. The displacement of local food production could be countered at least to some extent by giving support to local food production as well as production for the market. Marketing developments that encourage the flow of locally required food out of an area could be accompanied by the provision of additional storage and finance and if necessary also more direct short term measures such as physical controls over the movement of produce to ensure that enough food remains in the area at reasonable prices. This used to be common practice in colonial times, and although it may have exacerbated the problems of the food-deficit areas it is a measure that is worth considering in the short term at least. When it is the erosion of purchasing power that makes it less and less possible for the rural poor to purchase food at times of shortage the solutions required may be more fundamental. Nevertheless, there is often a lot that can be done by tackling basic food problems directly.

One might ask why so little attention is given to the rural food position these days. There has been a big change in this respect since colonial times when the complaint was that the authorities' preoccupation with food security was detrimental to important sections of the rural population. Williams[13] argues that the neglect nowadays has to do with the involvement of international capital and national urban interests preoccupied with the problem of extracting food for the urban population and exports to maintain foreign exchange earnings. For urban groups it is a question of getting the necessary food and foreign exchange in the cheapest possible way. In addition, they have an interest in the extraction of a surplus from the rural population. The surplus is threatened by policies directed towards improving the rural food position. Market participation is necessary both for the extraction of the surplus and to generate the cash flows that will enable loan finance to be repaid. Finally, market dependence is seen as a goal in itself, enabling government and other outside agencies to gain control over potentially independent rural populations whose interests will conflict at times with the interests of those seeking increased control. It is difficult to explain the current widespread neglect of rural food problems without some such argument.

THE "DELIVERY SYSTEM PROBLEM"

The new strategies for rural development rely crucially on "delivery systems" for the distribution of new technology inputs and credit. Co-operatives, government bureaucracies, parastatal institutions and even private organizations are suddenly expected to play a very much bigger part without the additional resources that might enable them to develop the capacity to handle the increased demands. Often, radical reorganization is also required. It is sometimes argued that inefficiencies are inevitable at early stages of development, that delivery systems will improve as time passes, but there is as yet little to suggest that this happening. Indeed the persistence of difficulties despite increased allocations of resources raises questions as to whether such organizations as presently constituted are able to perform the new roles expected of them. The ability of government bureaucracies to administer small farm credit is seriously in doubt, for example. The ability of co-operatives to function democratically without more radical reorganization than appears at present contemplated is also open to question.

In addition to the straightforward inefficiencies that prevent delivery systems from distributing credit, inputs and technology in sufficient quantity, there are difficulties in getting these systems to operate without a persistent bias in favour of the élite. Some of these problems are well illustrated in the case of co-operatives which continue to be encouraged despite what many would regard as a very poor record, at least as far as democratic participation is concerned. Co-operatives appear to be efficient only if heavily controlled and supervised from above, in which case they lose their resemblance to co-operatives in the sense in which the term is generally understood. Those that survive, heavily controlled from above, often with strong government support, are used to further the interests of dominant groups in the rural population. King[14] provides us with some interesting examples from northern Nigeria. Co-operatives that had become moribund were resuscitated in 1973 in the area King studied. He looked at six neighbouring villages and found that the effects of an apparently uniform policy of co-operative development were very different in each case. In every case, a locally dominant group was able to appropriate the gains available through the government supported co-operative movement, but the groups that were able to appropriate the gains and the ways in which they did so were different. Despite similar experiences in other parts of tropical Africa, co-operatives still appear to be regarded as a superior form of organisation in the context of rural development interventions.

The administration of farm credit is another example that illustrates some of the general problems of delivery systems. It appears difficult to disburse enough farm credit and even more difficult to enforce repayment once the credit has been disbursed. Furthermore, there seems to be little that can be done to counter the bias in favour of the local élite where the distribution of credit is concerned. Kenya[15] provides us with an example of credit programmes continually underspent, gross repayment problems, and what credit does get to farmers going to upper income groups, even in the small farm areas. The distribution of inputs provides us with another example of a delivery system in difficulty. Inputs arrive late or not at all. There are endless reports of bias, again in favour of upper income groups. The position is not much different with extension services.

Delivery system problems are particularly serious in a strategy that relies heavily on modern technology and purchased inputs. The reliance on purchased inputs has been particularly noticeable in recent years as more international agencies have become involved in African rural development. It can be argued that a strategy that relies heavily on purchased inputs is particularly inappropriate in tropical Africa. It certainly poses problems in a continent in which delivery systems are so relatively undeveloped.

What may be more fundamental however is the association of the systems with what is essentially a paternalist approach to rural development. Rural development interventions tend to be based on the view that those outside the rural areas know best what can and should be done. As Heyer, Roberts and Williams[16] put it, "rural development is something that is done to rural inhabitants". This can be seen in phrases such as "the need to develop the rural population" which implies that rural people are the *objects* of development. "The need to elicit rural participation" may really mean the need to get the rural population to do what the agencies want them to do, sometimes against their own interests. There is little recognition of the development that has been undertaken by rural producers themselves, often in the face of opposition from those who think they know better, trying to promote a different kind of development. There is now ample evidence of the ability of rural producers to respond to opportunities from which they stand to gain. There is also evidence of peasant resistance to changes which threaten rural standards of living even though the changes are being made in the name of rural development. Cowen[17] gives a convincing account of initiatives taken by rural producers coming into opposition with authorities promoting rural development of a different kind. Producers growing sun-dried tea come up against opposition from officials defending the official policy of support for the controlled development of factory processed tea, the financing of which is threatened by sun-dried tea production. Producers press for veterinary measures to protect exotic cattle at a time when the veterinary department refuses to support them. Another longstanding grievance in Kenya is producers' insistence on giving priority to food crops rather than cotton in areas in which official policy is in favour of cotton. Barnett[18] describes how tenants in the Gezira evade water use regulations to get better returns on scarce water resources. Coulson's account of agricultural development in Tanzania[19] is full of examples of rural producers coming up against official policy that runs directly against their interests. In many such cases it is clear that policy was based on quite false premises. Finally, Adams[20] provides us with a particularly interesting account of peasant resistance to change which is perceived to be against their interests in the Senegal River Valley. The particular interest of her account derives from the fact that the peasant association involved was unusually conscious of the conflicts which it articulated very clearly at each stage. In one of the exchanges with officials of SAED, the Senegal River Valley development authority, the peasant speaker is reported as follows:

> They had begun work before ever hearing of SAED interest in the area, and from what they had heard of SAED's activities in the Delta, it seemed that SAED-run co-operatives were not free to choose what crops they wanted to grow, and had to organise their work according to SAED specifications, which meant contracting debts for equipment, and having to grow more and more cash-crops; this was also the plight of peasants in the co-operatives of the groundnut areas.

And at a later meeting the peasant association chairman said:

> We don't reject SAED; we want to be free to say what we want to buy, and to keep our own accounts. We don't need much fertilizer, because the soil is good. It's not old soil. SAED would say, take 20 sacks, 30 sacks – then we're in debt. We don't want that.

The peasant association clearly understood what was involved in being taken over by SAED and it resisted strongly.

The idea that rural development might be initiated jointly with the rural population, or even that it might follow the lead given by the rural population acting as independent agents conscious of their own interests, is still far from being accepted in tropical Africa at present. Where the notion of partnership is suggested the rural population is always the subordinate "partner". Yet very real conflicts of interest are at stake, and the interests of different groups in the rural population are suppressed at present in most rural development strategies.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT EVALUATIONS

Fundamental conflict of interest questions are seldom, if ever, raised in the evaluations of rural development that are undertaken, often extremely carefully. This is because the evaluations tend to be undertaken within too narrow a frame of reference. The evaluations can and do show up the cases of gross failure, where the intervention fails by its own criteria. What they do not show up is the failure to alleviate poverty, and the aggravation of poverty where this occurs. These are questions beyond the terms of reference of most evaluations. We are suggesting that these questions should be brought to the fore. Both the design and the evaluation of rural development interventions must be based, at least partly, on analyses of conflicts of interest, paying particular attention to the position of the really poor. If rural development programmes cannot be shown to be alleviating poverty in the rural areas, one should ask (1) exactly what they are achieving and (2) whether this is something with which those responsible would want to continue to be associated.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

[1] *Rural Development in Tropical Africa*, edited by J. Heyer, P. Roberts and G. Williams, forthcoming from Macmillan, 1980. Many of the ideas in this paper have been developed in discussion with co-editors and authors of this book, although none of them shares responsibility for this particular paper.

[2] A. Coulson "Agricultural Policies in Mainland Tanzania 1946–76", *Review of African Political Economy*, 1978, and forthcoming in the Heyer, Roberts and Williams 1980 volume.

[3] A. Adams "The Senegal River Valley: What Kind of Change?" *Review of African Political Economy*, 1978, and forthcoming in the 1980 volume.

[4] B. Beckman "The Agrarian Basis of the Post-Colonial State, Ghana 1951–78", forthcoming in the 1980 volume.

[5] T. Forrest "Agricultural Policies in Nigeria 1910–78", forthcoming in the 1980 volume.

[6] T. Wallace, "Development Through Irrigation: An Overview of the Kano River Project, Nigeria", forthcoming in the 1980 volume.

[7] H. Heyer, P. Roberts and G. Williams "Rural Development", forthcoming in the 1980 volume.

[8] S. Berry *Cocoa, Custom and Socio-Economic Change in Rural Western Nigeria*, 1975.

[9] G. Holtman and A. Hazlewood *Aid and Inequality in Kenya*, 1976, p. 156.

[10] A. Shepherd "Agrarian Change in Northern Ghana: Public Investment, Capitalist Farming and Famine", forthcoming in the 1980 volume.

[11] J. Heyer, "Agricultural Development Policy in Kenya from the Colonial Period to 1975", forthcoming in the 1980 volume, among others.

[12] A.K. Sen "Starvation and Exchange Entitlements: A General Approach and its Application to the Bengal Famine", *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, March 1977, and forthcoming monograph, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*, Oxford University Press.

[13] A. Williams "The World Bank and the Peasant Problem", forthcoming in the 1980 volume.

[14] R. King "Co-operative Policy and Village Development in Northern Nigeria", forthcoming in the 1980 volume.

[15] Heyer op. cit.

[16] Heyer, Roberts and Williams op. cit.
[17] M.P. Cowen "Commodity Production in Kenya's Central Province", forthcoming in the 1980 volume.
[18] T. Barnett "The Gezira Scheme Black Box or Pandora's Box", forthcoming in the 1980 volume.
[19] Coulson op. cit.
[20] Adams op. cit.

DISCUSSION OPENING – WILSON NGUYO

Rural development programmes have come to be a regular activity of virtually all governments and many non-governmental agencies in developing countries. Such programmes are viewed as a vehicle for alleviating rural poverty among subsistence rural communities. Dr Heyer's paper is therefore very timely and treats a subject that is very dear to the hearts of many, especially in our association.

The author has had considerable experience in the area of rural development and her word cannot be taken lightly. It is therefore all the more disturbing to note that, after reviewing rural development programmes for a period spanning several decades over a good number of countries in both East and West Africa, she comes to the conclusion that not only have large scale projects been failures, on the basis of nearly all criteria, but rural development programmes in general have actually led to a reduction in the incomes of the poorest while disproportionately benefiting those better off who need help least, thus widening the already wide income disparities. Even more disturbing is the worsening food situation.

Dr Heyer identifies a number of factors which have contributed to the failure of both large scale projects and rural development programmes in general. I shall not go into the details of these except to note that many are fairly elementary and avoidable but so far experience shows that the same mistakes continue to be repeated. The inevitable conclusion one arrives at is that the rural population would have been better off without any development programmes.

I have a few observations to make on Dr Heyer's analysis.

1 I would argue that Dr Heyer has been too ambitious in preparing this paper. She has covered too long a span of time, too extensive a region and too many programmes and projects to be able to give an in depth evaluation of such programmes and projects. She has therefore tended to overgeneralize her analysis and her conclusions.

I would agree with her that many projects were failures. But I would argue that some projects were successful, either on the basis of some or all criteria. I would also agree with her that it is enlightening to point out the failures and the causes of such failures. But I would argue that a mention of successes and lessons to be drawn from them would give a more balanced picture.

What I am saying, in short, is that Dr Heyer has given an unduly pessimistic view. Let me illustrate my point by referring to one project – The Land Settlement Programme started in 1960 in Kenya. The objectives of the programme were:

(a) To increase the agricultural productivity of the land involved through more intensive farming. It was expected to achieve a 50 per cent increase in productivity in each of the schemes at maturity in four years.
Results: Some schemes met the targets and a few even exceeded the targets. But the majority failed. The authorites concerned have drawn usefully on the experience so gained to help the less successful schemes and individual holders.
(b) To increase employment on the land involved and therefore ease unemployment in the country. It was expected that the land would support twice as many people after settlement as it supported before settlement.
Result: Some 40,000 families, the majority of whom were landless and unemployed were settled in the programme. It is doubtful that the population supported on the land was doubled and, indeed, the programme did not make a significant contribution to the unemployment problem. But the equity aspect of it was most appropriate.
(c) To effect a rapid and orderly transfer of land from foreign ownership to indigenous ownership. Kenya was at the point of attaining independence and this was indeed the most important reason.
Result: This objective was attained. As a result, a desirable degree of political stability prevailed, thus creating a good climate for a vigorous economic activity, both in the rural and the urban sectors.

In conclusion, the settlement programme could not be described as an unqualified failure.

2 Judging by the currently prevailing mood in the developing countries and, indeed, the world as a whole, rural development projects will continue to be undertaken. The question is what contribution can we, as agricultural economists, make to minimise repetition of past mistakes and to bring about greater success in future? This is a very difficult question seeing how little success we have achieved in the past. I have one or two observations to make.

(a) First, government leaders are in a hurry to undertake programmes. They want to be seen to be doing something to solve the problems afflicting their peoples. Economists are often accused of taking too long to arrive at meaningful advice on the possible outcomes of alternative courses of action in rural development. They have also been accused of giving rather theoretical, operationally imprecise reports which cannot be put into operation without considerable reorganization.

If we want to be effective, we must meet the challenges implied in these statements rather than take defensive positions.

(b) If we as agricultural economists want dramatic changes in the performance of rural development programmes, it is unlikely that we shall get them on the basis of marginal improvements in the conventional design and implementation techniques we have so far been using. We must come up with new approaches. In this connection I find suggestions made by Niels Roling, Fred Chege and Joe Ascroft interesting. These individuals were based at the University of Nairobi Institute of Development Studies and did considerable empirical work on rural development programmes in Kenya, especially on the Kenya Special Rural Development Programme. They were especially concerned with the problem of equity. They suggest what they refer to as "a feasible alternative route to equitable rural development". They suggested the essential features of such a development strategy as:

1. Vigorous continuation of the development of welfare services which are available to all, such as roads, water, electricity, health services, schools, recreational facilities, etc.
2. Vigorous development of agricultural innovation packages especially adapted to small farms, combined with strict control of preemptive production by big companies or large farms using such innovations.
3. Rechannelling of extension, credit and marketing services to those small-holders who lag behind in development so as to enable them to adopt the innovation packages. (The "progressive" farmer will forge ahead anyway with less assistance.)
4. Strong emphasis on group extension over individual extension methods to increase coverage of scarce government resources so as to enable inclusion of small farmers.
5. Support of the elements listed above by
   (a) imposition of a ceiling on land ownership and redistribution of excess land.
   (b) the vigorous promotion of contraceptive methods, and
   (c) the development of rural industries.

Time does not allow going into detailed discussion of these issues. Neither can one guarantee that such a strategy will definitely lead to success if adopted. But I hope it does stimulate thoughts into possible innovations in rural development planning.

Finally, I would like to re-emphasize three or four points mentioned above:

(a) Concentration of extension resources on the "forgotten" farmer is likely to pay off more in the long run since he has, in comparison with the "progressive" farmer, a greater unexploited potential than the farmer who is already farming relatively efficiently.
(b) Innovations must be presented in packages that present a favourable mix of inputs and services. Otherwise, the problem of a limiting factor or bottleneck will continue to frustrate efforts to improve the performance of rural development programmes.

(c) Education is one of the most powerful weapons against rural poverty. Universal education, up to a reasonable level of literacy, available to all is likely to have a substantial pay-off.
(d) Rural development programmes must be based on empirical results if maximum results are to be achieved with limited human and material resources. Training in agricultural economics must take this into account.

GENERAL DISCUSSION – RAPPORTEUR: A. SEN

The discussion was opened with many participants observing that the author was too critical. It was argued that many large scale projects were indeed successful. The author had referred to the groundnuts scheme for a large part of her discussion. This was too old an example and indeed was so heavily dominated by political factors as to have been known to be a failure even before it started. There were examples of successes, such as the Gezira scheme, and not all projects ignore local resources.

The discussion then went on to conceptual points. It was suggested that there was a confusion in identifying failure with the failure of certain groups to gain. Could we really afford to concentrate on special groups? Where there not always trade-offs? Should we not give proper emphasis to comparative advantage rather than protect local agriculture? What did the author mean by "large scale" – plantations or large investment? The former presented problems but these should not be confused with rural development involving the latter.

On the question of actual implementation, two types of points were raised. First, it was asked who was to blame? Large scale projects are usually preceded by feasibility studies – the failures must be at the design stage. Local personnel are generally ignored and, later, blamed for not being competent. Could we not have more interaction with local administrators as a substitute for consultation with farmers? The heterogeneity, which the author admits, means that we should have a longer time frame, i.e. give the projects a chance before declaring them failures, especially because data gaps make evaluation difficult. Secondly, some participants felt that the author was not sufficiently aware of the adaptibility of African farmers – although they are distrustful of strangers, they would not be so stupid as to destroy their base of subsistence.

In the midst of this critical response one participant felt obliged to support the author. Most models were biased by neoclassical assumptions which were not very suitable to underdeveloped countries. The author had made a start by appreciating conflicts of interest. What was needed was greater emphasis of political questions and dialectic between politics and economics.

In reply, the author apologized for not being able to discuss individual questions because of a shortage of time. On the accusation of being too critical, she said that there was no intention of being despairing but she did want to make a strong plea against complacence. True, everything had not failed in every way. Success or failure depended on the criteria one chose. This was at the heart of the disagreements that the discussion revealed. She had chosen to focus on the increasing incidence of poverty and famine. This is now well documented although possibly Kenya suffers less than other African countries.