



AgEcon SEARCH
RESEARCH IN AGRICULTURAL & APPLIED ECONOMICS

The World's Largest Open Access Agricultural & Applied Economics Digital Library

This document is discoverable and free to researchers across the globe due to the work of AgEcon Search.

Help ensure our sustainability.

Give to AgEcon Search

AgEcon Search
<http://ageconsearch.umn.edu>
aesearch@umn.edu

*Papers downloaded from **AgEcon Search** may be used for non-commercial purposes and personal study only. No other use, including posting to another Internet site, is permitted without permission from the copyright owner (not AgEcon Search), or as allowed under the provisions of Fair Use, U.S. Copyright Act, Title 17 U.S.C.*

*DISCUSSION**Chairman :*

I would like to make a few brief comments on Dr. MacDonald's paper. I am glad that he clarified towards the end of the paper that he was loathe to conclude simply that large, agricultural enterprises are more productive than small farms. Indeed, he does recognise the possibilities of arranging for progressive small owner-operated farms, and here in the West Indies where entrepreneurial skills and organisational ability may be lacking, as it was in South Italy, the state has a positive role to play. Failure to develop the small farm sector results in a dualistic structure in agriculture, where you have an agricultural structure made up of a small, modern sector with high skills and a large, primitive sector.

I. Johnson (Jamaica) :

Mr. Chairman, I am very glad to have heard Dr. Mac Donald's paper, and to know that agricultural economics have now become more firmly grounded in the art of the anthropologist and the sociologist than formerly. Too many of our programmes in the past were designed without looking into the implications of the human aspect. Dr. MacDonald's paper explicitly avoids discussion of the cultural aspect. Yet in fact, the disillusionment encountered by so many technical assistance experts is due in many cases, to cultural obstacles. I believe that Dr. MacDonald's paper suffers by avoiding discussion of culture. Could you please comment on this, Dr. MacDonald?

J. MacDonald :

I agree that this is important; but for the purpose of convenience I have abstracted this away. As you say this should be examined. There is a great deal of work on the question of cultural obstacles to agricultural development, especially in anthropology and community development. I prefer to concentrate on social structure which is much less appreciated. I would hazard a guess that the majority of studies concentrate on the cultural aspect. This is very largely due to the fact that community development people, if they are not anthropologists themselves, usually turn to anthropologists when they are working in the underdeveloped world.

What I tried to do is shift the balance away from the cultural anthropologist explaining non-acceptance of modern techniques by simply saying that the particular people's culture is against new methods or gives a greater preference to old ways. Using the sacredness of cows in India as an explanation of backwardness is a classic example of this line of thinking. The structural aspect is especially important when we must decide to organise agricultural development because re-organisation means changing structures, not values. If you launch land reform or land colonisation schemes, what you are really able to do, as far as directives, administration and control are concerned, is to re-organise the structure. The thinking of the people—the farmers—has to be approached from a different avenue such as education, propaganda over the radio, advertising through mass media, and whipping up ideological fervour. So there are two separate

avenues of practical action. It's not just an academic abstraction to separate the two — the attitudes or orientations of the people and their beliefs, on the one hand, from the arrangement and the organisation of agriculture on the other.

In fact, from the practical viewpoint, these can be approached in quite different ways. When, for example, you are making laws and administrative regulations and when you send your administrators and bureaucrats out to apply them, what they are doing is altering the structure, not the attitudes. If they also perform some sort of educational role, they are probably not good at it. It would be better to hire an advertising agency for radio broadcasts or appoint agricultural extension workers or a community development worker, with leadership qualities who are really able to win people's hearts. Also, I go even further by contending in this paper that the economic structure of the organisations, the groupings, that go into agricultural structure will over-ride attitudes in the not so 'long run'. For example, if we make a comparison between Italian day labourers in the Northern Po Valley and gang labourers in the sugar plantations of the Western Hemisphere, we shall find that their economic performance will be remarkably similar, and this is why I say in the not so 'long run' attitudes will be over-ridden by organisations.

I. Johnson (Jamaica) :

Is it not true to say that we could have the best structure in the world and because the attitude has not been right, these programmes have not got off the ground ?

J. MacDonald :

Because you do not have entrepreneurs.

I. Johnson :

Let us take the case of farmers whose attitudes have been against accepting programmes. Now we could have the best programme structure in the world, but unless you can take into consideration the attitudes of those people, you would never get your programme "off the ground."

J. MacDonald :

It depends on what part of the programme you are running, because you should divide up a programme into several parts, and perhaps only attack one of them at a time, avoiding those numerous land reform schemes which have started off with ninety-nine different aims and none of them have been completed. If you are in a position to deal with land tenure itself, or with the structural basis of labour, then you are dealing with the question of structure. It is best to concentrate efforts. If, instead, you start off a scheme which has several aims, both cultural and social, and try to apply them all at once, you are unlikely to get a feed back. In other words you are unlikely to be able to look back at the end of the first year or first five years and be able to say which are the factors of effective change. I fear that, after more than one and a half centuries of land reform since the French Revolution, we still really do not know which types of new structures are working well. Every now and then we have a successful

scheme and we look at it and we do not know which factors are responsible for its success. I'm sure that it is important to change attitudes, for example, through the schools or through extension services or through rabble-rousing. But, if we are going to make a decision and go to our Minister of Agriculture or the land reform agency and say we need "X" number of dollars for this, we should really be able to say, for example, that it is worth putting a hundred thousand dollars in the T.V. propaganda rather than a hundred thousand dollars into new land registration to clarify titles. It would be wonderful if cost effectiveness studies could be made to compare narrowly focussed projects, some concentrating on structural change, others on cultural change.

E. Timothy (Trinidad) :

I am afraid I'll have to harp a little on Dr. Johnson's initial statement about the lack of representation of cultural patterns and their responsibility for certain failures in certain parts of the world. I imagine your Italian example can come in here, too. I was wondering if the difference in tradition, between the Italians of the Northern Hills and the Deep South, is responsible for the divergent structures in the two areas. The Americans and the United Nations working in Asia and other parts of the world have experienced difficulties based on tradition, and they have been working with people who apparently, from your report here, are less peasant than the people in the Italian situation. According to your first footnote, you say it was confusing to go along with Professor Firth, who insists that the economic system is only to be fully understood in the context of social, political, ritual and moral factors. Is it possible to neglect these other considerations? For example, the social sanctions that made the difference between the share-croppers or the share farming type people in Italy. Or can we neglect that fact that certain peoples based their whole agricultural system on their cultural patterns of marriage customs. In other words, can we realistically concentrate on only one facet of agriculture? Shouldn't you really, in the light of all that we have known, try the other extreme and tie in as many things as possible in order to improve receptivity in agriculture?

J. MacDonald :

I believe there is a general tendency to exaggerate the inflexibility of traditions amongst peasant peoples. We generally have a picture of peasants being stable over the ages, and of having certain time-worn traditions from which they will not budge. Now, this may be true this week or this season, but let us look at peasant Europe, particularly Mediterranean Europe, where you have the naughty peasant who insists on doing the wrong things. Most observers go down to Spain, or Greece or Sicily, and get the impression that these traditional peasants have never changed their ways. In fact, if we examine history, even their recent history, we will see that they have changed tremendously. For example, the small holders of Southern Italy were not always small holders.

Small holdings began to proliferate there only after Napoleon's armies passed through and most of the population achieved land of their own only after several decades, especially after the 1880's. Look at the dowry system: we often go to a rural community with

the preconception that this has been going on for thousands of years, and we exclaim with horror: how can we break them away from this! Yet the dowry system in Southern Europe is only about a hundred years old, as far as the population at large is concerned. Dowries in Europe were traditional only among the wealthy classes. The dowry system became widespread in Yugoslavia in about 1900.

It would be valuable to make cross-cultural studies to see how far there are remarkable similarities between small holders in different parts of the world with quite different traditions. We can see, for example, in Southern Italy and in many other parts of the world where there are small holders, that there is no outside hired labour and they keep to themselves, and, in effect, withdraw from the market. Associated with this self-sufficiency in each household, there is the very strong value on family life, in sharp contrast to the flexible family life of plantation labourers in the West Indies, Hawaii, the Southern United States or Northern Italy. If you find some family values associated with the same kind of economic organisations, around the world, then we can conclude that changes in economic organisation will change the cultural norms associated with family life. We might also find that it works the other way round, too: changes in family ideology may lead to changes in agricultural organisation. Now, in the case of Southern Europe, you can say that first came the land reform which was imposed from outside, and then came the formulation of the family ideology which rationalised the new economic behaviour on the basis of the new economic organisation, which was derived from the land reform and liberalisation policy. In this case, economic structure preceded the values of the families. I would certainly not say, however, that this is a universal process, because, in other circumstances, you have a popular ideology in favour of a strong class family life. The only way to implement this ideology is to get off the plantations and have a small holding, where you can protect your family, where you can keep your children together, where you can have a legacy for your children. Perhaps, East Indians have been leaving the plantations in Trinidad and taking small holdings; this is the result of their family culture. This is why they did not move to the towns as the Negroes have. In other words, the Indians wanted a small holding on which to base their family life, which was very important to them. But in Mediterranean Europe, the process was the other way round. And this is why I think we should separate cultural questions from structural questions, in analysis as well as in practice.

H. Williams (Trinidad):

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to support a lot of what Dr. MacDonald has said. In particular, I do feel that if government gives the lead, the population often will follow; it may follow a little slowly, but it will follow. And the other thing is that if effort is concentrated on a relatively small number of factors, then progress will come much faster.

A few years ago, in Trinidad, there was interest in the possibility of an organisation of cane farmers. But those in power in the sugar industry at that time were definitely against government setting up such an organisation. The idea had been that the authorities would simply set out the possibilities and wait for the farmers to come forward on their own initiative, then the govern-

ment would intervene to support the new organisation. But the whole thing remained static for a number of years, until government itself was forced to launch a cane farming organisation. Then we have the case of Guyana with rice. The whole population has largely been tied by traditional habits, to rice. Why? Because government set up a marketing board and lending organisation and all the rest of the machinery. So, instead of producing 10 or 15 thousand tons of rice, Guyana now produces more than a hundred thousand tons for export. You have the case in Jamaica, of dairying. A milk plant which at first received a trickle of milk now receives very large quantities. Why? Because a lot of effort was concentrated on dairying. I think experience shows that if we can just pick one or two things and concentrate on them, then I am sure the extension officers will get much more satisfaction and substance out of their work.

J. MacDonald :

I do feel that there is a blind-spot in our scheme, because we have not gone into the question of marketing boards. We mentioned supporting institutions only as an aside. Many marketing boards have been remarkably successful, and some of them, total failures. This is something we have not been able to examine. I would like to see some studies really appraising particular kinds of agricultural organisations. We cannot sit back and say we can examine the history of different sorts of agricultural organisations as they are known in different countries, and draw from this experience different combinations of elements which are more effective or less effective. The lessons of history do help us to avoid mistakes made in the past, but looking back does not help us to choose among really new ideas.

New combinations of structural elements which have not been tested by time must be subjected to experimental tests. I am afraid however, that sociological imperialism will inspire eclectic evaluation studies which will try to study all factors at once. It is fashionable to insist that we have to take into account all the social factors, all the institutions, we have to make a thorough study. But with such a relativistic, particularistic approach, how can we unscramble the factors.

This is why I have tried to warn against going all out with the sociological approach which is not discriminating, which does not concentrate on particular factors which are demonstrable and which at the end of the first stage of a project permits us to look back and say: we did this or we re-arranged things a bit differently and that did or did not work out so well.

O. Dibbs (Australia) :

I feel rather the amateur farmer amongst a lot of efficient sociologists and agricultural economists here, but I would like to make just one or two comments. In connection with this change from cultural patterns of long standing. In my own country, Australia, many of our successful farmers are from Scotland and from Ireland, very much in the last case the real genuine potato digging Irish peasantry and now two generations later, you can go to large and extremely well organised farms and stations which are being run on most modern lines by these same families. Farmers can change very fast under the right circumstances.

An experienced practical farmer who is given the opportunity to acquire a large piece of land, 500 or may be a thousand acres, under lenient terms can set up a central or home farm and progressively establish a number of share farms with a sound, proven share farming contract and the people who work on the preparing of the farm then move on to be the share farmers, and after a period of successful experience, maybe two, three, four or five years, having proved that they can operate, and learn to operate by sound production standards, will have at the same time acquired additional capital for themselves and will have generated the proof that will entitle them to a normal commercial loan from a normal commercial lending institution, possibly backed by a guarantee mortgage scheme. There are a number of these sorts of projects developed along old patterns, such as those in the centre of Italy, of which Dr. MacDonald has spoken. There is a wonderful opportunity now for some of our young people to do the initial paper-and-pencil research which can lead to a decision that these one or two forms, are really worth trying.

Mrs. R. Rawlins (Trinidad) :

I just wanted to support Mr. Williams' remarks on the importance of economic organisation as being the key to changing the structure of agriculture, rather than cultural values. I think, perhaps, some of the earlier speakers who wanted to put emphasis on the cultural values were assuming that they knew all about the structure. Dr. MacDonald was very carefully dealing with methodology, with examples from outside the West Indies because, perhaps, it is we who should inform the Conference on the West Indian situation. We have not had that sort of analysis along the lines of Dr. MacDonald's typology, applied to the West Indies yet. I think this is now what we should work on. Just a further comment on the question of the disappointed international experts and aid givers. Possibly their emphasis on the anthropological approach, the cultural approach, stems from the fact they do not have any role in the national policy decision-making which is essential if any kind of structural change is to be made in agriculture. Consequently, they are left on the fringes without responsibility, without the opportunity to make the structural changes which they might see and desire, and many of them might not be willing to undertake responsibility for structural change. Consequently they concentrate on cultural values, which in fact do not get to the root of the problem.

J. MacDonald :

We have been asking that you don't go overboard with a great deal of sociological factors bearing upon the behaviour of farmers. In any sort of analytic scheme, whether you are going to apply it or not, one needs an experimental sort of framework in which you isolate the variables. Often when one sets up an experimental situation or a laboratory test, one looks for a single variable. Now the trouble is, of course, that in real life there are usually at least two variables oscillating at once and you can go on and on bringing in more and more factors as some of my colleagues do, who are relativistic and particularistic in trying to cope with all the variables. One does have to be parsimonious even if one isn't going to be practical, parsimonious from the scientific viewpoint in isolating the variables.