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SOME IDEAS ON THE SOCIOLOGY OF SMALL FARMING IN JAMAICA

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The history of the development of the West Indian peasantry has been well-documented by Marshall.[1] This paper examines some of the social characteristics of contemporary small-scale farming in Jamaica. These characteristics can be traced to the origins of the peasantry beginning in 1838 and to its subsequent neglect.

1. Poor Quality Land and Fragmentation

The land operated by small-scale farmers in the island is of the poorest quality - a direct result of the early settlement pattern. The excessive fragmentation of small holdings is a direct result of the small-scale farmers reaching a saturation point when they could not expand any further inside the plantation areas. Moreover, the generally low level of education made it difficult for many members of the growing rural community to move out of agriculture. It should also be pointed out that the prevailing inheritance system favours fragmentation, in that after the death of a farmer, each child, whether in farming or not, is entitled to a portion of land. It is not unusual to hear a farmer say "when I die, I must leave at least a house-spot for each of my children. "The inheritance system has negative consequences for agriculture in that large portions of family land are unused owing to absentee ownership and furthermore, development of the land is retarded as family members who farm usually cannot use the joint land-title to obtain credit.

2. Low Farm Income and Part-time Employment for Cash Wages

The size of farms and the quality of land impose severe limitations on the income of small-scale farmers who, as a consequence, are constantly in search of wage-labour. They frequently express a desire to break the routine of farm work, to do something else for a few days each week. Although many small-scale farmers obtain their income by working on sugar, banana and coconut estates they express not only the need for cash as a reason for working off their own farm, but also the need to change their working environment. In addition to agricultural work, many farmers supplement their farm income from such occupation as carpentary, masonry, tailoring, shoe-making, butchering, shop-keeping, and from public-works projects. It is also very possible that the need for off-farm employment arises from under-employment on the farm, resulting from farm size and from the seasonality of production.

3. Low Level of Education and a Dislike for Agriculture

The development of small-scale farming in Jamaica carried with it an element of aversion to agriculture. This is well illustrated by the fact that immediately after Emancipation many ex-slaves attempted non-farming occupations, but as Marshall points out, "most of those in flight from the estate attempted to acquire land - the reason for this was obvious - cultivation of the land was the one skill the ex-slaves possessed."[1] The failure of the small farming to provide the farm-family with an adequate standard of living has helped to reinforce a bias against agriculture.

The small-farming community, however, has found itself in a vicious circle; for as much as there is an aversion to agriculture, the limited facilities for education and, furthermore, the poor quality of education in rural areas and the centralization of non-farming activities in the urban areas, have left many ruralites with no alternative but to get a few squares from some relative, rent or lease land - and enter an occupation which they know will not change their status in life. The net result of such an on-going process is that today, the older farmers have resigned themselves to their lot of poverty and rationalize their involvement in agriculture in terms of its functional importance, e.g. "it is the staff of life", "without food we all die"; while at the same time they would only like their son to be a farmer "if he does not have the brains to be a teacher."[2] However, the young un-educated in rural Jamaica have fully realized the cycle of poverty in small-scale farming and are refusing to farm or to be continuously employed for wages in the agricultural sector. They prefer to be unemployed rather than "to burn in the sun, for little

[1] Marshall W.K. "Notes on Peasant Development in the West Indies since 1838", *Selected papers from the third West Indian Agricultural Economics Conference,* 1968 U.W.I., St. Augustine.

[1] Marshall W.K., *op. cit.*, p. 254.

[2] B. Van Heck and C. McCulloch, *Small Hill Farmers in Jamaica* U.N. F.A.O. Report, 1969, p. 97.

or nothing". Such an attitude is also the product of an English conservative educational system unsuited to an agricultural environment.[1]

4. Farming as A Way of Life

One is not unaware of farmers expressing a very strong affection for land, plants and animals and in like manner the reasons they give in many cases for being farmers and for remaining in farming are non-economic. Farmers in a few districts in Eastern Hanover, Jamaica, were asked:[2] suppose you could get a job elsewhere with about the same income as you get from your farm now, but paid weekly in cash, would you give up farming? Of a total of 115 farmers, 39 said yes, 67 said no and 19 said I don't know. For the 67 farmers who answered negatively their main motivations were: physical retirement (old age), the independence in farming, the love for farming, the affection for the plots previously farmed by their parents, the love for their environment and the security motivation.

A number of studies conducted in Latin America revealed a strong sentiment among peasant farmers towards land, plants and animals. Thirty peasants in a Costa Rican village were asked whether they would choose the same occupation that they had - working the land - if it were possible for them to have a choice. Eighteen answered in the affirmative giving such reasons as "the tranquility of farm life", "like to see things grow" or "I was born into it." Peasant farmers in Costa Rica were also found to be against the use of some pruning techniques because they felt sorry for the plant - "It is a pity," "It hurts you in the heart to cut down a plant."[3] The obvious pre-occupation of peasant farmers with land, plants, and animals with strong overstones of "ends rather than means" is embodied in the saying "agriculture is a way of life rather than "agriculture is a business".

5. High Degree of Tenancy

After Emancipation some properties were sold to the ex-slaves, but most of the land remained in the hands of the absentee land owners. This fact is no better illustrated than by the results of the 1961 Agricultural Survey of the island, which showed than 113, 239 small farmers (below 5 acres) occupied 11.8 percent of the farm land, while 351 farmers (over 500 acres) occupied 45.3 percent of the land. The situation today is that many small farmers remain in farming through renting land, usually on a yearly basis.

This state of affairs implies that the farmer is always on the "look out" for a new piece of land. As Kruijer points out "tenants without security of tenancy and also small land owners with a tenant mentality are disinclined to invest money in their farms and are very keen on getting a quick return for the money and labour put into the farms. --- The economic principles of backward, impoverished tenant farmers who have no security of holding is to get a quick crop without effort and investment and without bestowing much care on the land. This tenant mentality is a barrier, both to the proper management of the farm, and to obtaining the major goals of these farmers, sufficient food and money".[1]

6. Frustration and Adjustment

The cycle of sub-standard living and continuous failure to break out of the system has produced various kinds of adjustive behaviour in the small-farming community, e.g. aggression, Withdrawal, resignation and sublimation. Magic and obeah can be regarded as forms of aggression in the society. Some farmers withdraw by migrating to the urban areas or to England or the United States of America, while others relieve the tension by encouraging their children to withdraw from small farming.

Sublimation is the unconscious process in which the tension associated with repressed needs is deflected to new objects, new goals, new activities of an apparently unconnected nature. The other - worldliness (means to salvation that tend to remove the actor from secular life) of many small farmers as opposed to inner-worldliness (means to salvation that permit or require participation in secular life) may be a means of escaping phychologically the reality of the small-farming system.

It may be the case that small-scale farmers resign themselves to their lot and escape into the world of religion, developing close contact with the supernatural. The concept of "psychological reversal of status" (the poor and humble in this life, having milk and honey in the other life, and the rich and materialist in this life, having hell's fire in the other life) may also help to explain how religious behaviour may sometimes be understood in terms of blocked wishes in every day life.

This is in contrast to the Protestant ethic which legitimised certain standards or norms, and gave religious blessing to certain types of behaviour

[1]See Brathwaite "Social and Political Aspects of Rural Development in the West Indies". *Third West Indian Agricultural Economics Conference, op. cit.,*

[2]B. Van Heck and C. McCulloch, *Small Hill Farmers in Jamaica,* U.N.F.A.O. Report, 1969, p. 109.

[3]Manual Alers – Montalvo in *Rural Development in Tropical Latin America.* Edited by Turk Kenneth L. and Crowder Loy V., (Rural Development in Latin America). Cornell University, Ithacca, 1967 p. 60.

[1]Kruijer G.J. *Sociological Report on the Christiana Area,* Jamaica Government Printer. Duke Street, Kingston, Jamaica, 1965 p. 2.

characteristic of capitalism. Characteristics of the former pattern of behaviour, such as "attitudes of conformity with one's situation, of resignation in one's station in life, and of willingness to accept charity, are not elements positively correlated with development. To the extent that religion legitimates such patterns, it makes growth a slower process."[1]

7. Individualism and Low Levels of Co-operation

Van Heck and McCulloch,[2] also Pina and McCulloch,[3] found a high degree of individualism among farmers in Hanover and St. Elizabeth. This degree of individualism was in most cases expressed in phrases as "I like to be my own boss" and "farming makes me independent". Even when farmers choose farming as an occupation for their sons, thoughts or concepts of not being bossed and individual independence are dominant. We attribute such inclinations to the farmer's efforts to break all links with past slavery conditions. Individualism and low levels of co-operation may also be explained in terms of many people competing for scarce resources. As Kruijer points out "the demands of the biological self are so pressing that the individual is forced to concentrate all his efforts on self-preservation. The "self" generally includes close relatives, the family, - whereas the extended family falls into second place. Outsiders (non-family) are considered to be competitors and are the objects of feelings of hostility so that there is only a weak affiliation to group life other than the family."[4]

8. Inter-connectedness

The concept of inter-connectedness in rural social systems enables one to have a close-up look at small-scale farming - how it survives and why it is so resistant to change. The concept stresses the close relationship of the farming system to house-hold activities and with the farmers whole life. In short, economic factors are not discretely separated from social factors.

It is suggested, therefore, that small farming survives, in part, because the farmer as manager - entrepreneur develops affective relations with factors of production, land, capital (animals), plants;[5] as such, these factors are not totally seen as means and hence totally manipulated, but are in part seen as ends, form part of the farmers' life system and are only partially manipulated. This relationship forms the core of the saying "farming is a way of life" and the relationship is further illustrated by statements like "it hurts you in the heart to cut down a plant," "insects on plants should not be sprayed because they do not eat human beings". It is further suggested that small farming has exhibited resistance to change because in the main, a change has been presented in purely economic terms, with little or no cog-economic and social life.

9. Sociological Interpretations of Resistance to Change

Studies of Jamaican small-scale farming have shown slow growth of output compared with the rate of growth of output of all farms.[1] This very slow growth in output occurred in spite of considerable efforts on the part of Government agencies, supported by substantial resources, to bring about small-farm development. In addition to the explanations given by Edwards for this slow rate of growth the following points of view are offered.

A. The Small Farmers' Life System

The life system of the small-scale farmer is composed of his family, economic and social factors, closely integrated rather than discretely compartmentalized. In this system the "humanness" of the farmer and his family takes precedence over the other parts of the package which constitute his life system.

The small-farming environment is characterised by low incomes, relatively large families, poor infra-structure and hence a "culture of poverty." In this system emphasis is placed firstly upon the satisfaction of "immediate" human needs and secondly upon the partially manipulative factors of land, plants, animals etc. For the farmer, the immediate and the future are his reference points. The immediate in terms of providing for his family and the future in terms of providing for his old age.[2]

Taking into consideration the characteristics of the farmers' life system, it is possible that resources (financial-loans, subsidies) placed into the system might have been used firstly to satisfy direct human needs and aspirations (purchase food, clothes; pay children's school fees, send child or children to England; storehouse for farm produce turned into farmers house) and secondly,

[1] Alers – Montalvo, *op. cit.*

[2] Van Heck and McCulloch, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

[3] C. Pina and C. McCulloch, *Sociological Report on Farming* in the Pedro Plains, Jamaica, U.N.F.A.O. Report, June, 1968.

[4] Kruijer, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

[5] See Johnson H.M., *Sociology: A Systematic Introduction*, Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc. New York, 1960, a discussion of Pattern Variables, p. 137.

[1] Edwards, D.T. "The Development of small-scale farming, two cases from the Commonwealth Caribbean", *Netherlands Journal of Agricultural Science.* 16. 1968 p. 267–268.

[2] Edwards, D.T. *An Economic study of Small Farming in Jamaica,* I.S.C.R. University College of the West Indies, 1961, p. 252.

if any of the resources were "left-over", towards the specific farm activity for which it was intended.

It becomes rather important then, that those concerned with effecting change in small-farming systems realize that the concept of means and ends is not fully operative and that in such systems the condition more suited to change and development is where the sophistication of the farmers' physical environment (house, facilities - electricity, roads, pipe-water, recreation, health) is a step ahead of the farm technology being introduced. This suggestion does imply a negation of the conventional approach which would indicate that inputs on the farm should aim at improving farm income and subsequently the farmers' physical environment will be improved. The Jamaican situation dictates that the problem be tackled in reverse.

B. The Planning Effort

A good agricultural plan prepares the ground for its own implementation, particularly through extensive consultation during the planning stage. If a plan is drawn up without adequate financial information, without access to the relevant authorities and most importantly, to the farmers who will do most of the work, it will likely be very difficult, if not impossible to carry it out.

The first Enabling Scheme for agriculture in Jamaica, the Farm Improvement Scheme which was drawn up in 1945, did not come into full operation until 1949 after much revision. Since 1945 at least five major schemes have followed. One must, however, have great misgivings about the extent to which farmers have been involved in the development of the plans in which, from time to time, they have been asked or told to participate. In short, the small-farming community has been subjected to planning from above, and the extent to which these plans have failed to create growth in the sector, may in part, be the result of the uncommittedness of farmers to decisions in which they were not involved.

With respect to people and their involvement in action programmes, Knowles has pointed out that:

1. The individual feels commited to a decision to the extent that he was involved in the decision-making process;

2. the individual is reluctant to be involved in acts or processes about which he feels insecure.[1]

The outcome of this type of paternalism (telling people what is good for them) is that farmers engage in role-playing. Many are convinced that Government Schemes represent an easy way of getting "help" (subsidy, loan - a method of guaranteed subsistence), so they stay in the game by giving verbal and apparent assent to the details of their farm plans, but turn around and in part or in the whole do precisely the opposite to that which they have committed themselves. They take the "help" where they can get it and then use it in the ways they see most relevant to their particular circumstances. It follows, therefore, that for any plan to be successful in the small-farming sector it must be built around the "expressed needs" of the people.

C. The Extension Effort (Change Agents)

The people charged with the responsibility for executing programmes aimed at creating change and development are the key actors in this vital process of change. Regardless of how good the content of a programme is, the chances of it failing are high, if the people responsible for executing it lack (a) the technical subject-matter information to carry out the programme and (b) the social skills to convey the information and to persuade rural people to accept new and improved practices. It is clear then, that change agents, with the wrong attitudes, with inadequate technical subject-matter and without a thorough understanding of the socio-psycological factors operating in rural areas can act as barriers to development.

Since the transfer of agricultural extension functions from the Jamaica Agricultural society to the then Department of Agriculture in 1951, the Jamaica School of Agriculture has been the almost exclusive source for recruiting extension officers. The degree to which graduates of the Jamaica School of Agriculture have made a success of a job which not only involves a knowledge of scientific agriculture, but also of economics, education, sociology and psychology - can in part be evaluated against two factors: (a) the curriculum of the Jamaica School of Agriculture and (b) the types of in-service programmes conducted by extension departments. That training in economics, education, sociology, psychology and their applied areas has been terribly neglected at the Jamaica School of Agriculture and more so, in in-service training programmes, needs no further elaboration in this paper. Henderson contends that "the inadequate training of extension officers makes it extremely difficult for the officers to fulfil the complex role of innovator - analyst - instructor - advocator, that although these roles entail no actual role-conflict, the officers must experience a great deal of strain in their efforts to satisfy all these expectations."[1]

[1]Knowles, Malcolm – Jamaica Agricultural Society Leadership Course, U.W.I. August, 1967.

[1]Henderson T.H. "Conflicts in the Role of the Agricultural Extension Officer in the Windward Islands. Unpublished paper, 1969 p. 5.

When large numbers of change agents are required, for example, for agricultural development, the gap between the natural leadership qualities of the few natural leaders and the many ordinary men must be bridged through training in social science. The need for sensitizing rural change agents through social science training becomes even more urgent when we look at the socio-economic background of most agricultural change agents. They are in many cases the sons of the same type of farmers we have been discussing in this paper, with low levels of education and farms below 5 acres, or in some cases the sons of manual (factory) workers.

Higher and too technically oriented education in urban social settings have served to alienate youngsters and consequently produce psychological rejection of rural modes of existence and rural environment. This situation creates a terrific social distance gap between extension officer and farmer, and its logical consequence is that a communication barrier develops, or alternatively, the psychological rejection of rural environment and "backward people" frees the extension officer to "talk down" to small farmers. The farmer is sometimes even placed in the category of non-persons.[1]

Studies by Van Heck and McCulloch [2] and Edwards [3] show a low degree of contact between extension officer and farmer, which may explain, in part, the low level of adoption by farmers. Van Heck and McCulloch found that only 34 (29.5%) out of 115 farmers consulted their extension officer, while in the Edwards study 32 (37.2%) out of 86 consulted their extension officer. Van Heck and McCulloch also found that there were only 24 two-way contacts between the 115 farmers and extension officers. It is, however, interesting to note that whereas there were 54 (47.0%) of the 115 farmers operating on farms above 3 acres in size, 17 (70.0%) of the two-way contacts were in this group and 7(30.0%) among the 61 (53.0%) farmers operating on farms below 3 acres. This finding together with other information gleaned in the study area supports the usual criticism of extension personnel, that they work much closer with the larger than with the smaller farmers.

It is important that training programmes for extension officers aim at assisting them to develop empathy (the ability to place one's self at the view of other people, including people with backgrounds and cultures different from one's own) with rural people. Central to the training is an understanding of the emerging area of study called andragogy[1] (teaching adults) as opposed to pedagogy (teaching youths). The basic assumptions which constitute the theoretical foundation of andragogy are as follows:-

1. adults enter a learning activity with an image of themselves as responsible, self-directing learners;

2. adults enter a learning activity with more experience than youth;

3. adults enter a learning activity with a different quality of experience and with different development tasks than youth;

4. adults enter a learning activity with more immediate intentions to apply the learning to life-problems.

[1]See Goffman E., *The Presentation of Self in Everyday life*, Doubleday & Co., In.c Garden City, N.Y. 1959, p. 151.

[2]Van Heck and McCulloch, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

[3]Edwards D.T., *op. cit.*, p. 83.

[1]Area of Study being pioneered by Malcolm Knowles, Professor of Adult Education, Boston University, U.S.A.