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DISCUSSION REPORT

(Paper presented by G.M. Sammy)

Dr. Sammy was highly complimented for the quality of his presentation, not only for the information given on the region's raw materials and possibilities for import substitution, but also for his regional approach. Considering the region's high food imports and the need to produce food for local consumption, the question was asked whether it would be preferable to zone crop productions in the respective countries of the region, or to import the crops from the other countries into the country that would be manufacturing the product out of the raw material. According to Dr. Sammy the answer was not a single yes or no. It was a case of looking at the particular product to be developed and finding out what the ramifications would be with respect to processing and which would be the best system for the particular product. His own concept would be small-scale production if the quantity is not large enough for full-scale production. One would also have to be careful with industrialized manufacturing as it will merely frustrate the situation by increasing costs through transport.

Dr. Sammy was contradicted on the point that wheat cannot be grown in the tropics, when it was learnt that wheat varieties were being experimented on in Guyana and that they were sure, with the assistance of the Government of India and the FAO, they will very shortly be producing varieties adapted to the region. Dr. Sammy, however, was of the opinion that wheat was a temperate climate crop and assumed that it will be a high elevation crop in some cool region.

Comments were sought with regard to the production of by-products out of raw material resources, as the requirement in any industry may be so large that individual territories might not be able to produce that amount to satisfy this industry. Personal experience had shown that the utilisation of by-products depends heavily on the volume of raw material. With respect to the utilisation of trash fish, Dr. Sammy's idea of making best use of the system whereby trawlers were dumping fish in the Guyana banks would be to get a small factory ship, smaller than those of the Japanese or Russians, which would be placed centrally within the fishing banks; the fish can be brought out to it and processed for human needs or animal feed and then the finished produce sent inland.

The principle of comparative advantage was emphasized in the discussion. Thus, it was maintained that if one acre of bananas can bring input that can buy more wheat than an acre of bananas, it is good business to produce bananas and sell them and buy wheat. However, Dr. Sammy pointed out that this must be seen in the context of food with respect to any country as each country is obliged to produce enough or as much as possible to feed its own nation. When one begins to deal with the profit and loss system then this must be outside of the essentials that are necessary for one's own maintenance.

The possibility of using banana in producing flour was raised. It was learnt that the Food Technology Institute of Jamaica had done some very good work on a bread that is wholly acceptable. There is a problem when dealing with root and fruit starches, in that the removal of water is an added cost, and in the case of banana, the skin is a high percentage of the fruit. An alternative use for the skin must thus be found to make the system viable. Nevertheless, there was no problem in producing a wholly acceptable loaf of bread using 15 per cent banana flour.

Concerning the new concept of import substitution, one speaker recalled Dr. Sammy's thinking that there are economic considerations to be taken up in planning food production for the region, not the narrow financial profit areas but the broader economic implications. The answer was to think beyond the immediate individual's private profit and the comparative thinking of exporting one primary product and importing other foods, at a cost which covers that of processing done abroad. Food production must be based on small-scale community industries. The point was that the farmer should participate and get the income from all the stages of food processing, all the value added not just of the raw product but for all these products that can be developed from them, keeping the full economic benefits within the region. Dr. Sammy stressed also that the time has come when it must be realised that there are no persons more important to any society than the producers of food, and they must become involved in food production or they will pull out of farming altogether.

One delegate felt that part of the problem as far as supplies are concerned when local production on the small farm is looked at is in the structure of organisation of small farms scattered over all parts of the country. In that sort of arrangement the individual producers see their product going to a marketing board which takes it off their hands. Perhaps the farmer should also be able to see the final stages of the producer-cum-manufacturer arrangement where one moves from raw material production to manufacturing structure as it was doubtful to what extent marketing boards which receive the farmers' raw materials were integrated and could provide incentives to increase the local production of particular crops. The problem of bringing scattered produce together, it was suggested, was to organise producers around the land base as a basic setting - a strategy which was totally dependent on the willingness or strength of the political leaders to initiate.

It was learnt that this idea was dealt with in detail in a paper presented by Dr. Reynold Rampersad who maintained that this concept can be applied only to Guyana where there is a bigger land area for people to be shifted. However, the divergent view was also expressed that it also applied to small countries like Grenada where there were individual producers who do not have the type of capital or land base to derive whatever type of economy there is. Dr. Sammy saw it not in terms of thinking solely of small or big farmers. A region is picked and if it is capable of producing successfully then products could be processed for the benefit of all the people.

Delegates agreed that the big question was how to convert invention into innovation, how to remove the structural barriers where the intention is to maintain import-export relations, and the development of technology. Certain things are needed for the allocation of these technologies, proper marketing research, the proper direction from the government as against the old policies, and the removal of social obstacles. The region has mainly been concerned with technology originating in the developed countries without utilising the applicable intermediate type of technology available in Central America or India.

The statement that the region might not be able to be self-sufficient in beef because of the restrictions placed on Guyana was emphasized. Delegates felt that although a lot of social communicable diseases were allowed through the tourist industry, yet the West Indies would not allow beef from Guyana that probably have a little food and mouth disease; at the same time the same meat from Latin America is exported to European countries. In using the term food, Dr. Sammy had meant it in the basic sense of nutrient to the human body. It was emphasized that no nation could survive which would not first of all strive for self-sufficiency in food.