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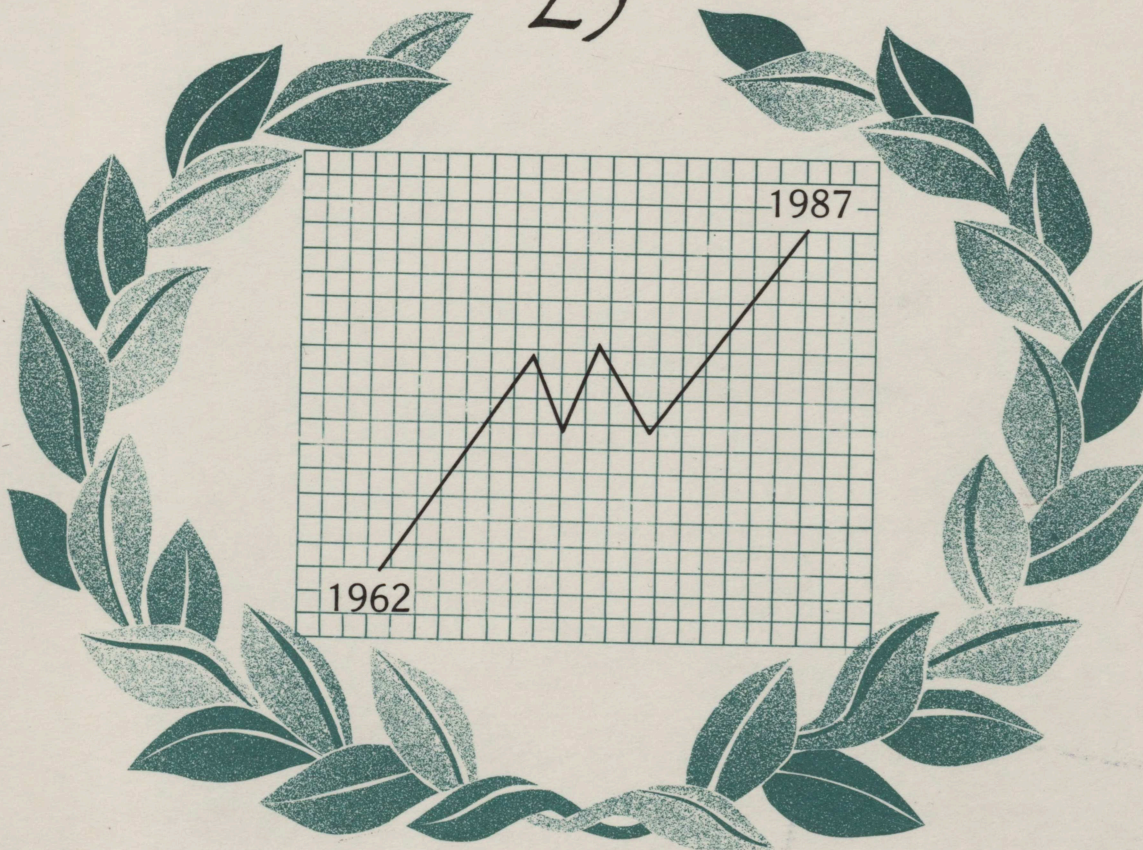
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# RURAL DEVELOPMENT: AN ADJUSTMENT TO CHANGED CIRCUMSTANCES

by S.J.J. DE SWARDT\*

## INTRODUCTION

Rural development and the related problems in this connection in Southern Africa must be seen as a whole, particularly in consequence of the population explosion and the ever-increasing cost of transport and agricultural inputs which must be purchased, such as implements, fertiliser, fuel, etc. Development programmes sponsored by governments, other well-intentioned bodies or persons, must take this fully into consideration or else their well-meant efforts will result in disappointment and frustration.

It has become clear that the rural areas, even in the potentially good agriculturally productive areas, can no longer provide the annual increasing population with a decent livelihood from the land they occupy. Similarly that the mines and industries also cannot provide this surplus manpower with a reasonable living. Consequently in most rural areas there is an alarming increase in the number of people, sinking into a state of poverty, with all its attendant results. In the urban areas also, in spite of the best preventive efforts by local and State authorities, there are increasing unemployment and slum conditions with all the evils arising from such circumstances.

Industrial growth with the accompanying infrastructure such as roads, power, housing, water, sewerage etc. is not taking place rapidly enough. Apart from the physical, human and technical problems in this connection, even a moderate acceleration in the tempo of industrial (and mining) development is not possible owing to the enormous financial costs this would demand from the authorities and private entrepreneurs. Recent estimates show that the total cost of industrial establishment can amount to tens of thousands of rands per worker.

Considerable industrial expansion can only be sustained if it can earn the necessary income to redeem the capital costs and generate the funds to justify further expansion. This is an arduous process accompanied by considerable risks. Furthermore it must be borne in mind that with increasing labour-saving techniques in industries worldwide, prospects are not favourable for the large-scale exportation of industrial products to other countries. Hence large-scale industrial expansion, based on extensive use of labour, does not offer a promising prospect to Southern Africa to accommodate its increasing surplus rural population. That is to say,

over and above the enormous financial implications to which reference has already been made.

## THE SOLUTION

In this dilemma there is only one solution. These must be original thinking and action. This great and pressing problem will have to be recognised and tackled as a whole with all its harmful effects and addressed on a broad front by a variety of well co-ordinated actions.

At the outset it must be appreciated that this is chiefly a *rural population problem*, a human problem and not an agricultural/industrial problem. Further that for tens of thousands of the persons concerned it is a problem of survival. Disease and a lack of food and clean water is already exacting a heavy toll.

It will further have to be accepted that the greater part of the surplus population can remain in the rural area - also that most of them would prefer to remain there. That is to say if measures are taken to make a decent livelihood possible for them there. It is possible. It is also the most economical way through which the authorities and others who wish to help can reach this great goal.

Although agricultural training, auxiliary aids and techniques can make a valuable contribution to improving the lot of those who become productive agriculturalists another plan for the remainder will have to be made. This is probably for the greater part of the rural population. That is to say for that section which cannot be advantageously absorbed in industry - and *also cannot* find a reasonable livelihood in agriculture.

## PRIMARY NEEDS

The primary needs of man engaged in a struggle for survival are water, food, housing, clothing and heating against cold. To make a decent living elementary facilities are also necessary such as hygiene, certain items of furniture (beds, tables, chairs, cooking and eating utensils), as well as personal freedom and opportunity for training, recreation and self-improvement.

All these can be provided in rural areas at a reasonable cost provided that it is planned and organised with the co-operation of all who should be concerned with the achievement of such a goal.

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## RAMIFICATIONS OF PROBLEM

The extent of the problem is so vast and so complex that the approach to it, with a view to practical solutions, must be made from various angles and by various methods. There is the broad national goal as already mentioned. But the Southern African area is so big and the differences from region to region so divergent that it is only logical that the approach will have to be made from the viewpoint of each region and even sub-region.

The first problem is therefore to identify each region which can be regarded as more or less homogeneous, i.e. from the rural population viewpoint. With this will go the identification of the composition of the population; the numbers economically active in agriculture and the non-agricultural sectors; and an estimate of the numbers that can be regarded as "surplus" such as seasonal workers, unemployed and layabouts (vagrants).

This regional identification, accompanied by the population surveys and analyses, can be commenced where the rural surplus population problem appears to be most urgent and where able regional leaders can be found who are prepared to co-operate with the policy or central authorities.

It must be emphasised that for the successful execution of each project local initiative and leadership should be given a free hand.

## THREE GROUPS

The manpower (breadwinners) of each region identified as a problem region and officially recognised as a *rural project region*, should be broadly subdivided into three groups:

*Group 1* consisting of agriculturalists in the widest sense, i.e. which includes field husbandry, horticulture, animal husbandry, forestry and fisheries.

*Group 2* consisting of persons who devote the greater part of their time to activities outside agriculture, such as mining, transport, business and tradesmen in construction and other industries outside agriculture.

*Group 3* i.e., those who do not fit into one of the two groups mentioned. This group can include persons who devote less than half of their time to activities as mentioned in Group 1 and 2 and who wish to do more work or other work to improve their living. This group will include seasonal workers who must leave home periodically, but also those who are actually engaged in a struggle to survive, including unemployed persons. School-leavers and other persons who wish to find a better livelihood will fall into this category.

It is self-evident that the approach to, and the treatment of each of these three groups, in order to improve the living conditions of the families concerned, will differ considerably.

Aid to *Group 1*, the agriculturalist group, will have to proceed according to well-known methods, namely through extension, production inputs, better techniques and where necessary financing, etc. Extension in respect of the size of units, production methods and marketing is particularly important. It is applicable mainly to production units operated individually and which are large enough, with sound practices, to assure the family of a decent livelihood.

*Group 2* has greater problems, particularly where the land is jointly owned by families or a tribe. Usually the land is too small to offer all the families a reasonable living. The problem is firstly therefore to determine which families or individuals are competent and willing to devote most of their time to agriculture and those who would rather choose a different livelihood.

It is extremely important to induce the families falling under the last-mentioned group, (those who are prepared to seek a living outside agriculture), to move to a nearby hamlet created for such families. It can be done by supplying them with building material to build their own houses and the provision of facilities such as drinking water, sewerage, schools and encouragement of home industries. This is dealt with in more detail later. Persons in these hamlets can do seasonal work or work in activities in the neighbourhood or, where regular transport is available, at workplaces in the vicinity. With the increasing appearance of industries and mines in rural areas and resulting urbanisation, increasing work opportunities for such persons will arise.

The problems of *Group 3* are probably the most difficult to solve but present great challenges. Attention is, naturally, being given to this by the promotion of decentralised industries. It is becoming clear, however, that complementary activities will have to be found in many of the more densely-populated rural areas to provide a reasonable living for the rapidly growing populations which can no longer be accommodated there. Job opportunities for new unskilled workseekers in urban complexes are steadily decreasing. It is this group which in reality is struggling to survive.

It is particularly in regard to this group that original thinking and action has become so urgent. Complementary to what is already being done to promote decentralisation of industry, planning will have to be done to establish villages on selected sites within population problem areas where small industries are encouraged. These villages will be bigger and more modernised than the hamlets previously mentioned. Home industries can naturally also be operated here. But it must offer more, namely small industries, which with outside assistance, are undertaken and operated by small entrepreneurs. By these means increasing job creation can be provided at relatively low cost. What is more, it will promote labour-intensive activities.

## HOME INDUSTRIES

The opportunities for the promotion of home industries in Southern Africa are almost unlimited. Quite a lot is being done here and there but the potential for expansion thereof is enormous. That is to say if the matter is taken in hand purposefully on a national scale.

A good example of what can be achieved in this field is what has been done for generations already in Switzerland where it is undertaken by farmers' co-operatives for the mountain dwellers who, during the long cold winters, are often house-bound for months at a time. The problem of making home industries economically viable is addressed purposefully.

This is done largely on the following lines:

- (i) Organised instruction is provided in certain subjects such as woodcuts and wood-carving, metalwork, leather work, embroidery, clock-making, toys, ornaments, etc. In each trade young persons are selected each year to attend a training centre for intensive, full-time instruction in one of the selected studies. The instruction, mainly practical, is given by qualified and experienced practitioners of each specific craft. This instruction is provided in a specific centre where the various subjects are covered by a number of teachers each of whom is a specialist in his or her field. Each person identified for training is also taught how to transfer the knowledge gained to others and it is expected from such a person that on returning home to the hamlet or village to transmit the instruction and knowledge to local persons.
- (ii) The instruments and equipment used in practising a craft are strictly standardised. Each item must conform to specifications supplied by the co-operatives.
- (iii) Similarly each piece of material used in production must comply with standardised specifications such as for cotton, linen, wool, metal, leather, fast colours of materials, etc. This is to ensure that every article made and offered for sale will be a quality product. Purchasers of hand-made goods wish to be certain that they are purchasing good quality articles.
- (iv) *Design* - The central organisation employs persons who continually create new designs for the various articles made. A specific design for articles sold must not be retained too long for fear of it becoming commonplace. The trained persons are taught how to interpret the specifications and drawings in connection with new designs and to convey these to others in their environment.
- (v) *Sales* - A central organisation is available for the marketing of all the home-made quality articles. Craftsmen(women) can sell articles locally but the majority are marketed by the central body in the metropolitan centres of Switzerland and Europe.

This is probably in broad outline the best example in the world of how large-scale and profitable use can be made of the labour and skill of people living in dispersed and distant hamlets. Home industries must be seen as part-time activities alongside agriculture and other local activities.

Urban industries such as the watchmaking trade also entrust the assembling of watches against remuneration to selected persons in such hamlets. It is successfully practised in Switzerland and Israel.

Interested parties would find it rewarding to make a study of the large-scale utilisation of rural labour in Switzerland and Israel as well as other countries, such as Taiwan. South Africa can learn much from this.

## TOURISM

Great use can doubtless be made of tourism to augment the incomes of rural dwellers. But here the matter must be purposefully undertaken. Necessary facilities for travellers and holidaymakers will have to be provided as well as extension, regional planning and financial assistance where desirable. Here private initiative can fulfil a valuable role.

With rapidly accelerating urbanisation of South Africa tens of thousands of families seek a peaceful rural environment in which to spend a few quiet days and nights, particularly the increasing number of occupants of multi-rise apartments without a small private garden.

The days are past when most city-dwellers can escape for relaxation to beaches, game parks and the big holiday resorts. The numbers are getting too big and the costs too high for the average salary earner and worker. For him simpler and cheaper relaxation facilities must be provided in rural areas within a reasonable distance.

The USA has long since recognised this problem and addressed it by the creation of a statutory body, namely the Farm Home Administration. Under this scheme extension and financial assistance is given to small and part-time farmers to provide in or alongside their own homes minimum facilities for paying guests. This consists mostly of a comfortable room with toilet facilities, green lawns with shady trees nearby and space for young children to romp. Usually there are a number of these units within a radius of 6 km in which simple club facilities such as a swimming pool, tennis courts and a clubhouse are provided. In vacation times the club facilities are utilised by the holidaymakers, but in between are used by the local inhabitants.

Similar facilities are provided by another official administration for extension and financial assistance to local small industries and for facilities for tourists in villages and rural areas.

Everything possible must be done to keep the rural population in the countryside and at the same time offer the urbanised masses in the middle and lower income groups the opportunity of finding, at a reasonable cost and within reasonable distances, a

haven for relaxation over week-ends and during school vacations.

## CONCLUSION

The foregoing is an indication in broad outline of what can be done on a large scale to address meaningfully the problems arising from the rapid population growth. But then it must be undertaken in co-ordinated fashion over a wide front as a social or population problem of the total rural population. In addition to the central, regional and local authorities, influential persons and organisations and industrialists will also be able to make important contributions to improving the quality of life of the less privileged people in rural areas. There will also be projects where outside organisations such as churches and certain international bodies can provide financial and other assistance as part of their declared aim of better living conditions for the under-privileged in Africa. The more so, if there is clear evidence of well-considered, comprehensive and co-ordinated plans to address the problem as a

whole.

The remarks made above are valid for all sections of the rural population, including White farmers. It must be borne in mind that only a small proportion of White farmers are really commercial farmers. There is good reason to accept that a quarter of the farmers in South Africa is responsible for three-quarters of the total agricultural production. That means, that the majority are small and probably part-time farmers. At most irrigation schemes many Whites cannot apply all their time advantageously to agricultural activities only. Most of them can possibly be regarded as part-time farmers and should be treated as such by the authorities by means of extension, financing and job-creating activities where it is feasible in their vicinity. The question arises whether there is any sense in the present application of legislation attempting to limit the size of farms to a so-called "economic unit". This only makes life difficult for the part-time and potential part-time farmers.