TOWARD A POSSIBLY PRACTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

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"We have met the enemy, and he is us"
--Pogo

My assignment is to suggest a policy framework for the pursuit of rural community development objectives. I propose to do this in three steps: First, I will describe some major elements of existing policy. As an outgrowth of my interpretation of the performance of this policy, I will then explore an alternative approach to formulation of the rural development issue. Finally, I will outline a policy framework consistent with this approach.

THE EXISTING FRAMEWORK

There has been much attention within the Federal Government in recent years to what one might characterize as "rural affairs." Legislatively, a host of programs have been inaugurated. Some of these programs, such as the Area Redevelopment Administration (predecessor to the Economic Development Administration) and the Regional Commissions are entirely new. Programs like the Low-to-Moderate Income Housing program of the Farmers Home Administration are extensions of earlier authorizations.

What has resulted from these and other similar program initiatives? At the risk of oversimplifying a complicated subject, let me describe the existing framework in terms of four prominent features.

Programs, Yes; Policy, No.

There is, to begin with, no overriding national objective toward which these programs are directed; nor is there an effective mechanism for identifying such objectives and moving programs in concert toward them. Public programs influence development in many important ways, but not as part of a common policy. The distinction between "program" and "policy" is key. Programs are normally built around *inputs* for the accomplishment of specific tasks. Since these programs can and often do have a considerable impact on the market for these inputs, the producer groups who are affected take an active interest in the design and administration of these programs. A review of the legislative history of a few of these programs will demonstrate just how seriously they take this role. Policy, on the other hand, is concerned with the *product* of these programs; and often with the combined products of several programs. Though we are all consumers of these *products,* with the exception of such forces as Common Cause, Ralph Nader, and an occasional populist political candidate, the consumers' role is not very well represented in the policy-making process. Most political leverage is organized instead around producer interests that sooner or later become reflected in particular programs.

Though progress is slight, there is some evidence of an increased awareness of the high cost of treating each part of the social system in isolation from the others. The first official act of the incumbent administration was to establish an Urban Affairs Council, of cabinet rank, to advise and assist the President in the formulation of a national urban policy. The Agriculture Act of 1970 broaches the subject by establishing various reporting requirements on the topic of developing a "sound balance between rural and urban America." The Housing and Urban Development Act of 1970 commits the Congress to "development of a national urban growth policy" aimed at encouraging "the rational, orderly, efficient, and economic growth, development, and redevelopment of our States, metropolitan areas, cities, counties, towns, and communities in

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predominantly rural areas which demonstrate a special potential for accelerated growth." Several influential study groups, including the National Goals Research Staff, the White House Task Force on Rural Development, and the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, have all argued in behalf of moving from a programmatic to a policy emphasis.

But we are not yet there, as I believe most of those associated with these efforts would agree. In the conduct of public affairs, we still do poorly in distinguishing between the "urgent" and the "important."

Program Proliferation.

A second major hallmark of the current policy-making scene and one not unrelated to the subject just discussed is the program legacy of the past 30 to 40 years. The major tool of public policy since the New Deal and especially over the past decade has been the new categorical program. As problems have been identified, new programs have been launched to treat them. By one estimate, between 1960 and 1968, the number of domestic federal programs increased from 45 to 435 [10 p. 5]. The 1970 version of the Executive Office Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance lists over 1,000 separate "programs." Many of these are billed as "experimental," though I find that a questionable use of the term. In the absence of a generally agreed upon policy framework and an administrative mechanism capable of effecting it, this proliferation has made these shortcomings more conspicuous. Though oversimplifying, Peter Drucker [4, pp. 8-9] comes uncomfortably close when he says "modern government has become ungovernorable. There is no government today that can still claim control of its bureaucracy and of its various agencies. Governmental agencies are all becoming autonomous, ends in themselves, and directed by their own desire for power, their own narrow vision rather than by national policy ... Even the President of the United States cannot direct national policy anymore." The same impotence can of course be found among State and local governments.

For the Executive Branch of the Federal Government the present situation represents a stalemate of sorts. Operating within a limited budget, it has been able to restrain the growth of existing programs. Yet, it has been unable to avoid new program responsibilities or to properly evaluate and eliminate those programs that are ineffective. There are exceptions, but not many.

The problem of program proliferation does not persist because those in high office think it unimportant. When he was Counselor to the President, Daniel Moynihan [9] observed that "too many programs have produced too few results simply to accept a more or less straightforward extrapolation of past and present practices into an oversized but familiar future." On the basis of recommendations of the Ash Council, the Nixon Administration introduced proposals for the reorganization of the Executive Branch of the Federal Government. One of the four Departments to be created, the Department of Community Development, would house most of the economic development programs now found in the Departments of Commerce, Agriculture, Transportation, and Housing and Urban Development. This action would hopefully provide an organizational framework more hospitable to policy formulation than the one we now have.

Unfortunately, there is little indication that the Legislative Branch shares this interest. Given the present distribution of powers among the membership of the legislatures, there is probably too little incentive to expect much reform from within their ranks.

Some progress can be seen in the handling of Federal programs at the State and local levels. As a result of the Intergovernmental Cooperation Act of 1967, many Federal grant-in-aid programs must now move through a common planning system. It would appear the State and area clearinghouses which comprise this system will play an increasingly influential role in shaping and effecting future development policy, particularly outside metropolitan centers.

Program Targets.

In the absence of a guiding policy, each program has its own self-contained target population. For some programs, the authorizing legislation has set fairly specific eligibility criteria; other programs have wider latitude in which to maneuver. For most of the development-type programs, the criteria have had the effect of focusing assistance on places that evidence some form of economic distress. The distribution of funds through the Economic Development Administration (as required by its authorizing legislation) is determined by a combination of unemployment, low income, and outmigration variables. Regional Commissions are delineated on the basis of overall economic depression. The Special Impact Program of the Office of Economic Opportunity directs its aid to areas hardest hit by migration. While the depressed areas within which these people live are obviously an important part of the problem, their role in the solution is less clear. Despite this, much of the assistance associated with these programs is designed to achieve "place

prosperity." There is great reluctance to admit that development potential is not distributed equally over space.

The multi-county planning and development districts now being organized around the Nation offer a hopeful sign for the future.[1] The A-95 mechanism has given the districts important new leverage and at the same time helped bring State government more fully into the partnership. To the extent these districts represent semi-autonomous subeconomies, they can become the arena within which many of the critical allocative decisions will be made. But before these fledgling organizations can hope to become effective, they must acquire command over far more resources than at present.

Evaluation.

The final dimension relates not to what we are doing with existing programs but what we are learning from the experience. Improved public policy must ultimately be based on improvements in our understanding of programs and their level of performance. This requires a continual testing and probing of existing programs–who is directly benefiting? By how much? What is the cost-effectiveness of this approach versus others? What are the secondary effects? How does this program mission compare with others in its claim for a share of limited resources, etc.? In the absence of this information, there is little basis for supporting significant changes in program content or direction. And, unfortunately, it is too often absent. Those parts of the system having the most incentive to evaluate have too few resources to do an effective job and those that have the resources have too little incentive.

There are some exceptions to this, one of which is the Research Applied to National Needs (RANN) program of the National Science Foundation (NSF). Through this program, NSF will support research (a large share of it in the social sciences) having direct applicability to key policy questions. To be funded, the research must relate to an important policy issue, be of explicit utility to a decisionmaker, and provide generalizable results in the near or mid-term.

In brief, the situation we face is this. Despite a multitude of programs, each with its own administrative machinery and clientele, there is no overall agreement on end objectives. Each program goes its separate way, sometimes complementing the activities of other programs, sometimes working at cross-purposes. With the exception of budgetary measures of resources inputs, comparatively little is known about program performance.

FORMULATION OF THE ISSUE

Thus far, I have said nothing very specific about the topic--rural development. What is rural development? What sets it apart from other public issues? It would seem to cut a broad swath: poverty, education, community infrastructure, health, land use, and housing are some of the many subjects included. The common denominator that binds the many diverse interests together is not to be found in the subject matter, however, but in the geography. The characteristic that sets the rural development issue apart from others is its concern with the economic and social activity of a specific part of the national landscape--*the rural part*. The problems are measured along rural (or nonmetropolitan) boundaries; rural people and rural institutions are courted; programs are designed to reach mainly rural areas; the administrative responsibility for these programs is assigned to rural agencies in a rural Department answering to rural Committees in Congress.

All of this must seem terribly obvious and trite. And it would be except that the really important policy manipulable variables do not divide along rural-urban lines.[2] It is easy enough to describe problems on this basis, because that's how the data are conventionally arrayed. The difficulty arises in moving from problem description to policy formulation, the subject of this paper. An effective public policy intervenes in the functioning of a social system in a way that produces a desired result. The effects of an intervention that treats a part of the social system as if it were an autonomously functioning system in its own right will encounter problems both of acceptance and of operation. And that, it seems to me, is what is happening in the formulation of rural development policy today. What we are conventionally labeling "rural development" is in reality the composite *parts* of several different problems. And while it is useful to measure and analyze attributes of the rural component, policy solutions that are politically feasible, administratively possible, and socially acceptable require a different conceptual framework. In a sense then, our present formulation of the problem is itself leading us away from pursuit of more promising solutions.

[1] See John Fisher's "Easy Chair" columns for one assessment of the performance of a few of these district operations [6].

[2] My treatment of this topic borrows heavily from Bishop [1], Bonner [2] and Fox [7].

But how is this to be avoided? What would a new conceptual framework be patterned upon? Without going into elaborate detail, let's consider some possibilities. At the minimum, we should be able to identify some of the components of this framework and the policy implications that flow from them. Let me suggest six factors I think are worth considering:

1. *There is no separately manipulable rural society.* As I have already argued above, a policy distinction along rural-urban lines is futile. When geographical boundaries are a required part of the policy solution, they should conform to the pattern of economic and social forces at work there. Whatever the issue, the geographic division should be determined by the nature of the problem and not vice versa.
2. *What do the people want?* The ultimate purpose of public policy is the satisfaction of the wants and needs, hopes and aspirations of the people it is intended to serve. I like the list of "down-to-earth realities" Archie Haller [8, pp 3-4] has used: (1) Parents want their children to survive and grow up to be healthy–i.e. to have access to adequate medical services, pure air and water, waste disposal systems, nutritious food, and recreational facilities. (2) People want education. They want the knowledge and understanding that will enable them to relate to their surroundings and to take actions that will be beneficial to them and their children. (3) People want the opportunity to influence group decisions affecting their lives. (4) Most people want work that will enable them to support themselves and to contribute to the well-being of others. (5) Most people want a social system that will equitably distribute the task of providing goods and services and the renumeration for doing the work, while allowing special rewards for those who make especially valuable contributions. I would add one other to this list, that people want the freedom to shape the precise form of their goals, each in his own way. Taken collectively, these are elements of the "good life." Public policies that work toward these ends stand a reasonable chance of gaining public acceptance and support.
3. *What are the needs of the people?* Of fundamental importance is the need for economic opportunity through: (1) increased labor productivity as a result of investments in health, education, nutrition, and training; (2) the linkage of jobs and qualified job-seekers; and (3) income maintenance for those who cannot secure economic independence through participation in the labor force. There are other needs--the need for modern community services, for more effective government, better housing, racial equality–but the central need is economic opportunity. Once that is achieved, we will be far closer to satisfying other needs.
4. *Political muscle.* Public policy is formed through the exercise of political power. Though in earlier times, rural areas had substantial influence upon the exercise of this power, this too is rapidly changing. A report prepared for the President's Commission on Population and the American Future estimates that U.S. Congressmen representing predominately suburban districts will account for 60 percent of the total by the year 2000. The proportion representing districts outside suburban areas and central cities will decline from about 45 percent at present to 27 percent [15]. In a period in which political alliances based on old geographic boundaries are in a state of evolution, alliances that bring together those with common economic and social needs would seem to have more longrun viability. There are particular advantages in seeking an alliance around issues that involve sizable spill-overs of costs and benefits between political jurisdictions, such as occurs in education and welfare.
5. *The private sector.* In a capitalistic economy, most of the national product originates in the private sector. Though public policy is a useful tool for controlling and directing this force, the private sector will continue to be the principal allocator of the Nation's resources. It is, therefore, important to design a policy that will complement this system and make maximum use of its allocative machinery.
6. *Uncertainty.* Finally, one must remember that the matrix of needs and opportunities now perceived will change in the future as it has in the past. It is prudent, therefore, to use public policy to foster a capacity to deal with the unknown as well as the known. Depending upon the nature of the problem, this capability may be nurtured among

governmental institutions, within the private sector, or among individuals.

A POSSIBLY PRACTICAL FRAMEWORK

What are the implications of these six factors for policy formulation? Before outlining a policy framework consistent with these factors, one should note that whatever the resulting product, it will not be a blueprint for "rural development." Rural development--in the sense of a wholesale revitalization of small towns and reversal of migration trends–is a mirage that will continue to evade those who seek it. The framework I would propose to develop would be "problem-specific" rather than "area-specific." Rural people, however, should benefit proportionately more from this policy than would many other residence-types. They would do so because the incidence of key social problems are higher among them, not because of any intrinsic or imagined value in the places where they live.

The following are a few suggested themes upon which a more detailed policy framework might be constructed.

1. *Minimum living standards.* The more pressing problems of our society, rural and urban, are problems of people. Whether it is hunger, unemployment, racial discrimination, poverty, crime, or drugs, it is with the individual that the problem rests–and that the solution must ultimately be found. Investment in the human agent is the most direct route to the source of these problems.[3] Assistance to the individual can take many forms. Over the past few years, several score have been tried. They have generally had the effect of substituting public choice for that of the individual, circumventing the market economy in the process. Few have worked well. Many people meeting the eligibility criteria have not participated; others have devised ingenious schemes to evade program constraints, including black market activity. The administrative costs have been high. And, with reason, the body politic has grown increasingly restless and skeptical of success.

   It seems to me a compelling case can be made for dealing more directly with the individual and equipping him to make the myriad of detailed decisions that are required. One means to this end would be the adoption of a national program to guarantee every citizen a minimum cash income, a minimum educational opportunity, and a minimum standard of health care. Though it could be so conceived, this is not a prescription for the alleviation of poverty alone, as measured by level of income. In many parts of the Nation, even a moderate income will not buy a satisfactory education or standard of health care. The nation's moving toward this policy now, though very slowly. They have more to do with people than with geography and people have not fared well in this match.

   Several minimum income proposals have been proposed. The approach recommended by the President's Income Maintenance Commission compares favorably with most. Several other versions are awaiting action in Congress. It appears now as if one of these might be adopted in this, the 2nd Session of the 92nd Congress. The health and education objectives will doubtless prove more evasive, though the recent court cases in California, Minnesota, and Texas are threatening to precipitate a major change in the way we finance public education. Clearly, dollars of input do not equate the quality of education or health care. But until such time as we are better able to measure these products and the factors that shape them, I believe most of those involved would settle for greater equality of financial input.

2. *Employment opportunities.* Investment in human capital can be an empty promise if it does not eventually lead to productive employment. For the rural worker, the problem is doubly acute, though inadequacies in the data don't permit precise measurement. The continuing labor adjustment made necessary by the capitalization of agriculture and other natural resource related industries has resulted in many thousand workers being in the wrong place with the wrong skills. It is not that these people don't want to work; there is ample evidence to the contrary.

   A variety of policy tools are now being used to address this issue: manpower

[3] A case in point is the recent analysis of the evidence gathered in the 1966 study by James Coleman of the effects of racial integration on academic achievement in public schools. The recent analysis [16] reaffirms Coleman's principal finding "that non-school factors, particularly family background, are much more important in determining educational achievement than anything connected to the school.

training, mobility assistance, employment information, job counseling, industrial incentives, etc. But they are not being applied on anything approaching full-scale. Total MDTA enrollments through fiscal year 1970 represented the equivalent of only 10.5 percent of those in the 1970 labor force with less than 9 years of schooling. Mobility assistance remains in an experimental state.

Other manpower programs designed expressly for the more isolated areas–such as Concerted Services in Training and Education, Smaller Communities, Operation Hitchhike, and the Ottumwa-type projects–are serving a useful purpose, but only in a scattered piecemeal sort of way.[4]

And when the private labor market falters, as it has done in recent months, opportunities for employment become even scarcer. It would seem that sooner or later the public sector will have to assume a more direct responsibility than it has in the past for taking up the employment slack. Given the many public service jobs that need doing–5.3 million in 1966 according to the National Commission on Technology, Automation, and Economic Progress–and the recent impact of the Aero-space layoffs, perhaps it will come sooner.

3. *Governmental modernization.* It is equally difficult to conceive of any lasting solution to our development problems, without some fundamental changes in our governmental apparatus. The problem is not confined to organization, though that is a significant aspect. Large numbers of very small governmental units, poorly financed, and often staffed with volunteer help impair operating effectiveness. As I noted before, the sub-State districts now being formed offer a promising vehicle for increased interjurisdictional cooperation. But until these districts are granted further powers, as a few States are beginning to do, the promise will remain largely unrealized.

Revenue generation and the division of functional responsibilities among levels of government are equally important parts of the issue. Our system of revenue generation, from the localities up through the Federal Government is in a state of general despair. When families with incomes under $2,000 are paying a significantly higher share of their income in taxes of all types (44 percent) than any other income class through the $15,000 and over class, something is surely wrong with our mechanisms for redistributing wealth [12, p. 43].

While tax reform is a complicated and politically sensitive issue, we are not without ideas of what to do. They include: the sharing of Federal revenues with States and localities; movement away from State and local sales taxes in favor of more progressive income taxes; improved administration of local property taxes; elimination of the regressive features of the payroll tax; less favored treatment for capital gains, mineral and oil depletion, and estate transfer; and the elimination of the tax exemption on interest of State and local government securities.[5]

Last, but certainly not least, one should not forget our State and Federal legislative bodies. Again, avenues for the reform of these institutions have been spelled-out by others. They include abandonment of the seniority system, reorganization of the committee system, increased staff support, changes in campaign spending practices, etc. Until these reforms are achieved, the opportunity to realize most of the other objectives listed here is greatly diminished.

4. *Social impact.* I believe it is apparent that our economic system will continue, in the years ahead, to disrupt the lives of people in unanticipated and socially undesirable ways. Changes in technology, in taste, in international relations, in belief and value, and, not the least, in public policy will fuel such disruption in the future as they have in the past. Illustrations abound. In agriculture, the displacement of labor continues. Tighter controls on environmental pollution have already lead to plant closings and laid-off workers. New concepts in prison reform, if applied, would result in the relocation of many correctional institutions from smaller

[4]For a description of these and other manpower programs see the Department of Labor's *Manpower Report of the President*[14].

[5]For an interesting proposal requiring a more fundamental change in our tax system see Thurow[13].

towns to larger urban areas. New highway systems continue to reroute the flow of Commerce. These changes and others like them commonly serve a beneficial purpose. But they also entail costs that are often unintended, unplanned, and uncompensated.

One guiding principle of any national development policy should be a commitment to consciously and deliberately anticipate such effects and to either facilitate the needed adjustments or forestall implementation of the measures until such time as we are prepared to deal with the social effects. Government agencies are now required by statute to file "environmental impact statements" on key program issues. As a first step, it does not seem unreasonable to me to require statements on "social impact" that would go beyond environmental concerns.

5. *Alternative urban forms.* For reasons of both necessity and preference, America will continue to be a Nation of many different urban forms. As a feature of national policy, we should continually monitor the performance of these alternative types and experiment with new forms.

We now have a Federal program in support of new communities. Though there is pressure to increase the scale of this program, I would argue for keeping it in a demonstration mode. It is improbable that new communities will touch the lives of more than a small fraction of our total population and most of these will be middle- and upper-income suburbanites.

In the more sparsely settled regions, a persuasive case can be made for trying settlement configurations that are more in keeping with present-day technologies. Marion Clawson [3] has etched one such example. At the least, it should be a conscious part of national policy to see that the people who live in these more remote areas have access to an urban place with sufficient infrastructure to deliver the public services required for attainment of the minimum living standards described above.

At the same time, there is a growing need for helping other communities that are slowly but surely (and some not so slowly) dying. Though some programs now provide help to these towns, more often than not it is extended under the guise of "revitalization." It would be better for all concerned if these efforts were guided by a more realistic appraisal of the situation. As others have noted, to preserve small town living, we need not preserve old mining towns and weathered farm villages. Remote small towns will not be saved, they will be replaced. Approaches like the Resettlement Program in Canada, though of comparatively recent origin, deserve closer study on our part.

At the same time technology is making it desirable to provide public services on a larger scale, the relationship of individuals with one another and with their governments would seem to be moving in a somewhat opposite direction. Feeling lost and powerless in the presence of a faceless and distant government, many people in the larger cities are petitioning for neighborhood government. Some of the same factors are at work in the cool reception often accorded the areawide or regional approach to development in rural areas. We will have to reach an accommodation with both phenomenon. It is not a case of deciding between the two; but of removing the contradictions so we can move in both directions simultaneously.

6. *Policy intelligence network.* Henry Wallace [11] used to say that "the major elements in all social progress were sympathy and knowledge." Though I don't believe many would argue we have an overabundance of either virtue, as researchers, we are strategically located to do something about the latter. Perhaps, with luck, we will find they are joint products.

Under present circumstances, it would appear that neither the knowledgemaker nor the policy-maker have understood one another very well. I believe it is fair to say that very little research of recent origin has had a direct and tangible influence over the course of public policy in this field.

We badly need an intelligence network that will supply a continuing stream of current socio-economic information. There is an element of futility in trying to design and evaluate public policy on the basis of information about the situation as it once was. Neither can one expect the private sector to respond to forces it cannot accurately gauge–such as underutilized labor

pools and employee residence preferences. Beyond this continuous flow of basic information, we need to establish a series of local laboratories within which we can study the details of community and area behavior, again, through time.

But, a better information system will not help much if changes aren't also made on the policy-making side. The need here is for "the clear definition of the results a policy is expected to produce, and the ruthless examination of results against these expectations. This, in turn, demands that we spell out in considerable detail what results are expected rather than content ourselves with promises and manifestos" [4, p. 16].

The more effective joining of policy and research will not be painless. Perhaps it will "require that we develop a new breed of politically oriented scientists and scientifically oriented politicians–that social analysis and social action be merged" [5, p. 252].

IMPLICATIONS

As members of the agricultural establishment, where then does this leave us? Contrary to what might be implied in parts of my paper, I am moderately optimistic about our future role as social science researchers. I am continually surprised and impressed by both the quantity and quality of the analytical resources that reside within our collective institutions. They represent an enormous force; one that can be used to help define and support a policy of the type I have sought to sketch out.

But before that can happen on a broad scale, we are going to have to make some fundamental changes in our concept of clientele and problem identification, as well as in the nature of our research products and our involvement in the application of research findings. I don't know whether we can make such changes from within our respective institutions or not. If we can't, I fully expect a solution to be imposed from without. Perhaps the place to start is to recognize that "we have met the enemy, and (at least in part) he is us."

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