

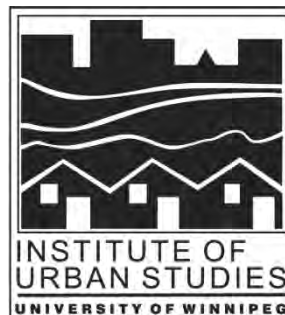
# **Rural Development in the Third World: A Practitioner's Definition**

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**by Douglas Webster  
1985**

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**The Institute of Urban Studies**





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**RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE THIRD WORLD: A PRACTITIONER'S DEFINITION**

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RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE THIRD WORLD:

A PRACTITIONER'S DEFINITION

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1985

1.

GOALS AND PURPOSE

Rural development is a process designed to improve the well-being of people living in a defined rural area, anywhere in the world. (This paper focuses on third world areas.) Rural development connotes societal or structural change in rural areas to realize increased well-being. Given the nature of rural development, simplistic indicators such as domestic regional product are, in isolation not adequate indicators of such development. Rather, indicators which more directly measure well being; such as food self-sufficiency, life expectancy, health of the population, ability to function in local society, caloric intake, etc. are better indicators of rural development. Rural development also usually implies a notion of equity as well as growth. That is, implicit in the concept is the notion that structural or societal change in rural areas should lead to a reasonably wide distribution of benefits. It is relatively easy to design programs which will raise the mean per capita income in an area through such processes as attraction of capital intensive industry, transfer payments, etc. It is more difficult to instigate meaningful rural change which will lead to a wide spread improvement in the quality of life and the well-being of rural residents over the long run.

2.

CONTENT

Rural development is almost always comprehensive in scope. Since rural economies are almost invariably based on agriculture or resource extraction e.g., intensive rice cultivation in Java or forestry in interior Malaysia a prime focus of rural development is the primary sector of the economy.

However, rural development differs from traditional sectoral programs focusing on a single crop. Such traditional programs were often successful in realizing one or two goals, e.g. increasing the output of rice or creating sustained yield forestry processes, while leaving the bulk of population in an area unaffected, or sometimes, worse off. Rural development tends to concentrate on the rural household rather than on a crop or a given sector.

Land tenure is of much greater importance than is the case in urban areas because access to land largely determines one's economic and social status.

The mix and availability of agricultural inputs and the marketing of outputs are of significant concern in almost all rural development projects. The role of extension services becomes very important.

Most designers and implementors of rural development projects attempt to effect what economists call vertical integration. That is, they attempt to encourage the processing of primary sector products in rural areas to increase the amount of income or "value added" accruing to the

geographic area in question. Furthermore, an attempt is usually made to encourage the manufacture in the rural development area of simple inputs to agriculture, e.g., appropriate technology implements. As a result, rural industry and agricultural processing are of high priority in rural development.

The human resource base is extremely important in rural development. People cannot produce unless they are healthy and have an understanding of how to deal with their local environment. This places a premium on health and education services in the rural development process. In terms of health, the emphasis has to be on preventive and simple curative approaches. In the Third World, resources do not exist for "western style" medicine. Education in the rural development process usually has as its prime goal the development of skills to enable the people to earn a higher standard of living from the rural environment. Even such time honored goals as literacy are now open to question (particularly in terms of older people). The goal of education in rural development is increasingly to enable people to use appropriate technology in their environment such as wells, simple machinery used in agri-processing, effective agricultural techniques, etc.

Infrastructure must be developed if rural development is to become a reality. Farmers must be able to obtain inputs and send products to market, as must rural industrialists. Potable water that is clean must be available to

the population while awareness of health risks associated with waste disposal must be achieved along with implementation of actions to reduce such risks. Thus construction and maintenance of key infrastructure both improves the level of health and enables the economy to function more efficiently by abetting the trading process.

Although rural development approaches vary in terms of the extent to which they advocate regional self-sufficiency, almost all recognize the need for trade, information exchange, and migration flows between the rural area and larger urban areas.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, infrastructure plays an important role in the rural development process in connecting rural areas to urban centers which are centers for the diffusion of information and inputs; and large markets for the products of rural regions. Although rural development approaches vary in terms of their attitude toward migration, cities frequently play a positive role in enabling "excess" population to out-migrate from heavily populated rural regions, e.g., Eastern Java in Indonesia. (Of course, cities can be parasitic if they drain the rural areas of their more highly educated, their young, and their highly motivated.)

For any rural area to develop there is a need for leadership. This necessitates training. In fact, it has been shown that in rural areas where career ladders can be created, young people are more likely to stay. Training enables young people to advance socio-economically in the

rural area as their usefulness to the area increases and to be rewarded accordingly. In cases where the land is farmed communally or cooperatively, career ladders are more easily created (or evolved) because of the larger and more complex scale of production. However where freehold by individual farmers is encouraged, there is still a need for people with technical skills and for leaders.

3.

### APPROACHES

Different countries of the world possess different ideologies as do different bi-lateral and multilateral development organizations. The commonality is the goal to improve the well-being of rural people discussed earlier. The fact that different ideologies exist accounts for some differences in rural development approaches. The fact that conditions differ in biophysical and social terms and the fact that the economic context varies (e.g., some regions are very remote from markets) are other factors leading to a diversity of rural development approaches.

One dichotomy that emerges in analyzing rural development is that between approaches that are based on cooperative or communal ownership and/or use of resources (particularly land) and those that emphasize individualistic approaches to the ownership and/or use of resources. In reality, distinctions are often made amongst different components of the production process in determining the



organization of production and the type of ownership or uses rights that is to prevail. For example, some rural development planners advocate that agricultural inputs should be purchased communally or co-operatively, that marketing should be undertaken cooperatively, but that production should be based on individual plots. Numerous variants of the above in organizing production obviously exist.

Rural development approaches can also be categorized according to the degree of regional closure they advocate. For example, some approaches advocate a self-sufficient rural economy whereby villagers are encouraged to produce food and other goods for each other and not for export markets. On the other hand, some rural development approaches advocate that a high percentage of production should be for export markets. (Although even in the latter case, some local production of food crops for local consumption is usually advocated.) The technologies used (e.g. organic versus manufactured fertilizers), the size of farms, and the types of crops grown will vary very much according to which of these approaches is taken. For example, the first approach would stress food crops for local consumption, small scale technology and small scale farms while the second approach would stress plantation and food crops for export, larger farms, and in many cases, larger scale technologies, e.g., combines for harvesting of wheat or rice. There is a great deal of debate about which

approach should be taken although most advocates of rural development emphasize approaches between the two extremes with a bias toward producing for local needs first.

Large scale farming may create a higher regional domestic product while at the same time creating a more skewed income distribution; therefore, tradeoffs sometimes exist between maximizing the output of the regional economy and generating a more equitable distribution of benefits. Where benefits will be skewed to a great degree by large scale export farming, the goal of rural development to increase the wellbeing of the bulk of the population will often mitigate against such an approach.

It is important that rural development programs be replicable and sustainable over the long run in biophysical terms. It is relatively easy to design and implement a high economic growth strategy which will deplete the soil, result in deforestation and desertification, lower the water table, etc. Therefore, a rural development project is only viable if it is sustainable over the long term. In technical-administrative terms, the same concept applies. That is, a rural development program may require technical or economic aid in its first years to "get it rolling" but over the longer run it too should be self-sustaining based on local or, at least, national resources.

#### 4. RURAL DEVELOPMENT: ESSENTIAL PREREQUISITES AND INPUTS

To undertake rural development successfully, several factors must be present or potentially available in a rural area. Firstly, there must be a desire by the local people to develop their rural society which almost invariably means a willingness to accept some change. Secondly, there must be delivery of technical skills in the substantive areas described earlier (section 2). Thirdly, there must be political will both at the rural-regional level and at the national level to bring about rural development. Lastly, but not least, there must be an allocation of financial resources to the area in question to instigate a rural development process. In some cases, this money can be raised at the local level but in most cases, this will require an infusion of national or international resources. International funding usually originates with bi-lateral donors such as CIDA or USAID or multi-lateral donors such as UNDP or the World Bank although in some cases NGO activities are being coordinated so that their actions constitute a comprehensive rural development strategy.<sup>2</sup> Often, however, these NGO activities will be coordinated by a national government working in conjunction with a bi-lateral or multi-lateral development agency.

5.

PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

The sequence, mix and nature of activities that commence with identification of a need for rural development in a given area will vary from project to project; however, some advice can be given at a general level. Firstly, rural development should be a deductive rather than an inductive process. That is, rural development approaches and content should reflect the biophysical, cultural, social, political, and economic realities; and goals of the rural area to be affected. (The temptation to apply the latest fashionable approach presented at the last rural development conference attended should be avoided.)

Planning

The first step in formulating a rural development program is to identify goals and objectives. (See figure 1) It is of little use to try to do something if you do not know what you are trying to accomplish. The goals will determine whether the strategy is based on a self-sufficiency vs. an export approach, a communal approach vs. a free-hold approach etc.

The goals formulation stage should be as participatory as is feasible. Local people, traditional leaders, representatives of the national government, representatives of regional (state or provincial) government, representatives of international development agencies (if applicable), etc. should all be involved.

Once goals have been formulated, more information must be obtained regarding the region so that an overall strategy can be developed in a deductive fashion. This involves identifying socio-economic and bio-physical potentials and constraints as well as determining how existing systems operate in reality. A wide gamut of systems must be analyzed. These systems were alluded to earlier (section 2) e.g., the land tenure, transportation, health, education, agricultural, forestry, fisheries and social systems. Once goals and objectives have been formulated and a knowledge of how and how well the system operates has been achieved, it is then possible to start formulating some strategic concepts. Although policies, programs and projects should be implemented by sector in most cases because that is the way governments are generally organized, it is important that planning for rural areas be done in an inter-disciplinary or integrated fashion. This will maximize synergistic effects. For example, a road will be more useful if it is routed through an area that is being opened up for agriculture. Similarly, a health center is likely to be more useful if it is in the same village as the local school, agricultural extension office and other public services so that people can go to the one village and use all needed services with a single trip.

Based on sectoral information, an initial strategy for the area in question should be formulated. A participatory process should follow to elicit feedback. Once a desired overall strategy has been formulated for the rural area in question, sets of actions should be identified for subareas,

often called integrated development areas (IDAs). Again, feedback should be obtained, this time at the IDA scale; the relevant institutional jurisdiction is often the district level of government. Once a set of actions or a strategy have been agreed upon at the IDA level, a further disaggregation should occur to identify a set of projects at the IDA scale.

In addition to projects, which are discrete actions usually at one location, e.g., a well to meet the needs of a specific area, a bridge; a rural development strategy should contain programs which are replicable actions based on a consistent set of principles which can be applied where desired. An example of a program would be a grade two school curriculum or a type of well which can be replicated in many places.

Policies are principles of intent which guide legislation, pricing, "the rules of the game", etc. Regional (provincial or state) governments are often weak in third world countries and so have a limited policy role; to the extent that they do have policy powers, the rural development strategy should address policy issues. National governments in third world countries almost always have extensive policy powers (although they may lack the capability to implement policies); in many cases these policies are detrimental to rural development because of the sensitivity of national governments to urban consumers and urban political power.

For example, food prices may be set artificially low discouraging agricultural development. In such a case, the rural development agency must do its best to try and change national policies. In some cases, the best implemented rural development programs in the world will yield little if agricultural prices are too low, if the price of inputs is too high or if inputs are not available to motivate rural production. For example, rural development has been quite successful in Ivory Coast, West Africa, because the prices paid for agricultural products in that country have historically been high; that is, near world market prices. On the other hand, rural development projects in Ghana, although many of them have been well formulated and well intentioned, have not had the same success because the prices for agricultural products, which are largely determined at the national level, are too low to motivate rural people to produce beyond the subsistence level on a continuing basis.

The possible rural development strategies that can be formulated are almost endless. The better ones are those that reflect local social, economic, and biophysical realities. For example, in a middle income country such as Malaysia, a rural development project may involve all local people leasing their land back to the rural development agency for twenty years to realize economies of scale in the use of labour, land and other factors of production. Given the larger scale of production, it is possible to establish

a rural career structure, (e.g. accountants, mechanics, machinery pool co-ordinators) so that young people will be motivated to stay in the local area. Input purchasing mechanisms, marketing mechanisms, small scale irrigation facilities, social programs and facilities, etc. can all be established on a more rational basis given this situation. In low income countries rural development programs would be very different and probably less complex than the example described above, but if they are to succeed they must be equally if not more attuned to local socio-economic and cultural realities.

#### Implementation

While the initial planning is occurring (as described briefly above), it is important that some small projects be implemented so as to create an image (and reality) of action in the minds of local people. These projects should be simple, unlikely to fail, high in profile and should be implementable quickly.

A rural development program is only meaningful and effective if projects are actually delivered.<sup>3</sup> To accomplish this, a project co-ordination unit should be established in the rural area.<sup>4</sup> A project cycle process should be established within the unit. Although details regarding the function of the unit and cycle are beyond the scope of this paper, some principles can be outlined. Firstly, as noted earlier, the project co-ordination unit should not implement projects (this is the role of "line"



ministries, NGOs, villages, VOs (Voluntary Organizations) and other local organizations) but should act as a conduit for funding (both national and international), and should monitor and evaluate projects. In this way, in "line" ministries that are not performing well can be "cut off" from future developmental funding (or funding can be reduced to a level more commensurate with the institution's absorptive capacity) and those that are performing well can be appropriately rewarded. Secondly, although a rural development strategy outlines an initial set of projects, the project cycle process should be an ongoing one whereby new project ideas can be considered at anytime and no longer relevant project ideas can be dropped. Thirdly, it is important that consultation with local people, local and regional governments, the national government, and international funding agencies be an integral component of the project cycle process. Formulation of short project briefs based on new ideas will ensure that not too much energy is expended on projects which will not pass the filter of initial consultation. Fourthly, the project cycle must work in conjunction with annual budgeting processes of relevant tiers of government and with the longer-term rural development planning process (described earlier); the latter process is often based on five year planning cycles but may be a "floating" or continuous rural development planning process.

In most cases, it will not be possible to implement all projects proposed, at least in the short run. Therefore, it is very important that critical projects and projects with high socio-economic potential be implemented first. Criticality can be determined by an important relationship of a proposed project to other projects, e.g., such a project may remove a bottleneck such as a lack of diesel fuel or it may be necessary to respond to an emergency such as a bridge "being out" servicing an area that is critical to food production or it may respond to famine in an area. Projects with high socioeconomic potential are those which will result in increased well-being of rural people through more food production, increased production of needed items of either a productive nature (e.g., farm implements) or of a consumptive nature (e.g., soap), improved health, improved ability to cope and extract a living from the local environment, etc.

There is little use in trying to implement projects in villages which are not desirous of development. There must be an expression of willingness to develop and change on the part of villagers and their traditional leaders if project implementation is to be effective. Criteria must be developed to determine which villages are to obtain support for project implementation. The simplest system is the triage one: (a) Villages that are doing very well with no help are left on their own (but are monitored to identify any problems). (b) Villages not working well and not

desirous of development are not the target of new projects (but may be the object of animation efforts so that they will fall into category (c) at a later date). (c) Villages that have potential (biophysical, social, economic, etc.) and are desirous of development are the object of project implementation activities.

6. ORGANIZATIONAL AND STAFFING REQUIREMENTS

As noted earlier, rural development will only succeed if local people want development and are willing to make and accept some changes in their way of life. Once this precondition has been met, as has been noted, technical skills must be made available. It is essential that rural development programs be managed, designed, and planned by people who can transcend traditional sectoral or disciplinary ways of thinking. Such people are rare but they are essential to the success of a rural development program. Conventional engineering, accounting, economics, or anthropological worldviews in isolation represent the antithesis of rural development.

Rural developmental programs generally have three tiers of professional staffing within the rural development agency itself. The first tier (management) should be staffed by a person(s) with substantive knowledge of a variety of fields but an ability to strategize which transcends these boundaries. Often the person(s) in this position is a

planner or developmental economist; however, it is essential that he or she have some knowledge of the primary sector, particularly agriculture. The second tier consists of long-term specialists with substantive skills (who may become managers of sub-sections of the rural development agency in the case of larger projects). The third tier consists of short-term specialists whose presence cannot be justified on a long-term basis, but who are needed to provide critical inputs in the planning, project identification, implementation, and monitoring /evaluation phases. Figure No. 2 illustrates a typical organizational structure for a medium sized rural development program during planning stage. Similar principles would apply during the implementation stage. Of course, the actual mix of skills required in tiers two and three would be modified to reflect local conditions. A good rural development program will be staffed by residents of the country in question; often they will be supported by expatriate staff.

The "line" ministerial staff involved in implementing rural development projects must transcend sectoral and ministerial institutional allegiances. Frequently, rural development programs fail because public sector employees are reluctant to work hard on an integrated rural development program. Employees feel both recognition for success and blame for failure is not easily associated with a given individual or ministry in the case of implementing integrated rural development programs; therefore, they are

often less motivated. This constraint must be overcome through a combination of a sense of social responsibility and through a better identification of responsibilities.

7.

#### CONCLUSION

The third world is urbanizing rapidly. By the turn of the century, Latin America will be dominantly urban while most parts of Asia will also have a majority urban population. Only sub-Saharan Africa will be predominantly rural by the year 2000. However, rural development will continue to be very important because rural areas will continue to contain a large percentage of the world's population and be responsible for almost all of its food production. As the third world develops, the link between the urban areas and rural areas will become more important. Increasingly, third world countries will have to produce a larger percentage of their food nationally. Food from international sources may become scarcer and more expensive than at present because of demand from burgeoning third world populations. This will mean that rural development planning will have to be undertaken in the framework of national planning and in the framework of national settlement systems policies. Also, it will probably mean that high regional closure (i.e. rural "self sufficiency" with very limited export of food from rural areas) as a rural development goal will not be acceptable in most parts

of the world. Rural areas will have to feed themselves first but will increasingly find themselves in a position of feeding urban areas from their rural agricultural surpluses. Therefore, although the percentage of the world's population living in rural areas will fall through time, the importance of rural areas could actually increase.

The challenge of rural development is to enable the people of rural areas to improve their standard of well being while at the same time developing surpluses that can be exported to urban areas. This must be done in the context of cultural continuity. That is, changes induced must be acceptable to the cultures involved.

Innovative and differing approaches to rural development will continue to develop around the world. Much is to be learned by comparative analysis of rural development projects. International agricultural institutes are developing new types of crops; new intermediate technologies are being developed for crop production, rural agri-processing machinery and techniques, etc. There is much occurring in the field that is relevant to specific regions of the world once goals have been established for rural development in these areas. Therefore, rural development, although it should be a deductive process, cannot be undertaken in isolation from these international information networks which are growing quickly both in terms of extent and substance.