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Community Action and the National Rural Development Agenda

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ABSTRACT

As a result of concern over three related issues—a renewed interest in self-help mechanisms, the farm crisis of the 1980s, and the renewed recognition of rural poverty—an agenda which focuses on rural development has emerged. Central to the formation of rural development strategies is the role of community action. This paper reviews some of the searching questions about the whats and whys of community action, about the distinctive problems and potentials of community action, and about how rural community action can be promoted.

Rural development has been on the national agenda in the United States since the early 1970s. Despite this, little concrete policy has been formulated. It is only now, at the end of the 1980s, that there is growing momentum toward the development of a national rural development agenda. This resurgence reflects three important and interrelated factors: (1) a resurgence of interest in promulgating self-help and community action mechanisms at local levels; (2) the farm community crisis of the 1980s which put rural America back onto the front pages of national newspapers; and (3) in the wake of the general crisis gripping American nonmetropolitan communities, rural poverty was rediscovered.

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If rural development is to become a national objective in the 1990s, and if community action is to be a key element of rural development strategies, the rural social sciences will be challenged to answer some searching questions about the whats and whys of community action, about the distinctive problems and potentials of community action in rural areas, and about how rural community action can best be promoted. This paper reviews these issues and suggests answers based on one particular theoretical approach to rural sociology. It further outlines some strategies for increasing community action potential in predominantly rural areas.

Do Communities Act?

A major facet of an active local society is the degree to which the field of community actions emerges as a result of "collective efforts to solve local problems and collective expressions of local identity and solidarity" (Wilkinson, 1986b:3; Kaufman, 1959). Charles Tilly (1973), in response to the growing literature of the late 1960s which bemoaned the loss of community, posed the question, "Do communities act?" According to Tilly's analysis, the accumulated evidence suggested that only a loss of local autonomy, not a general community decline, had occurred and, therefore, the use of a "decaying community" terminology was misleading when applied to the shift in the external relations of a group. While the process of urbanization, industrialization, and bureaucratization have contributed to the erosion of local autonomy, they have not sounded the death knell for community. Indeed, to Tilly, a key to determining the answer to his question of whether or not communities act was to be found in the degree to which a group continued to function on its own ground regardless of the presence or absence of connections to the larger society (1973:210).

Generally, Tilly believed that communities acted only under special conditions, namely when unusual events threatened local residents. In the presence of such events, it is not uncommon for a local identity to emerge which acts to coalesce people who share only minimal, if any, common interests. The fact that an all-embracing, *gemeinschaft*-like solidarity is absent does not diminish the ability of the local society to become cohesive in the presence of an event, controversy, or conflict. The more limiting constraints are whether a group can be mobilized and, if so, if that group could then generate and use a set of pooled resources for the betterment of the whole. With growing concern for the plight of the more than 20,000 small and rural towns in America, it is clearly necessary to understand these constraints if a reasoned and relevant national policy is to be generated.

Problems of Small Communities

Today the conditions that suppress community action in rural America are the same conditions that call attention to the need for rural development—namely,

conditions that indicate serious economic and social deprivations associated with rural space. It is important, of course, to recognize the effects of these deprivations; but it is also important to recognize that the potential for community action persists despite their suppressing effects. In the needed analysis, the first task is to recognize the problems facing community action in rural areas and the second is to work out strategies for addressing these problems to facilitate community action.

The problems of small communities in America can be grouped into two sets. First, there are long-term problems such as those described by Kraenzel's (1980) concept of the "social cost of space." Second, there are immediate problems resulting from rural upheavals during the past decade. These problems interact with one another to pose serious challenges to community action and rural development in the years ahead.

Contrary to romantic images about rural life, the social cost of rural living has always been high. That is, from the beginning of European settlement in the New World, residents of rural settlements have lagged behind those of urban settlement in their access to resources for meeting economic and social needs. This is partly explained by the economics of distance and density. The cost of goods delivered to or shipped from remote locations is increased by high transportation costs. Similarly, low density means high unit costs in provision of common goods such as public services. According to Kraenzel, however, the economic costs are only part of the picture. The social cost of space also includes a deficit of outside contacts and this can contribute to conflicts and disruptions within a rural settlement. Extreme individualism, sharp cleavages among local groupings, and problems of mobilization for collective action appear to be prominent features of social life in many small isolated settlements. The problems associated with this social cost of space are not new. They have their roots in the simple harsh reality of human ecology as well as in the spatial inequalities and center-periphery dominance patterns of modern capitalist development. Although much work remains to be done to sort out the specific origins, the reality of deprivation in virtually all rural societies is a compelling one.

In the case of rural America in the 1990s, the long-term effects of the social cost of space can be said to exacerbate the effects of a cluster of recent trends, beginning with population and employment turnarounds in the 1970s and culminating in the current situation of extreme rural instability. Contrary to previous trends, the nonmetropolitan population grew more rapidly than did the metropolitan population (overall and in most states) during the early 1970s, but by the late 1970s this turnaround had slowed, and in the 1980s it disappeared. While there is considerable local and regional variation, the overall pattern today is consistent with the overarching trend of the past century and a half in that urban areas are growing more rapidly than are rural areas.

The national recession at the beginning of the 1980s ended the rural boom. In many ways, the recession was more devastating to the rural economy than it

was to the urban economy, and the rural recovery has been much slower. The reasons for such differences can easily be seen when reasons for the recession are examined. In particular, increased foreign competition, declining attractiveness of American exports, and weak world markets had a negative effect on the industries that rural areas depend on—agriculture, energy development, forest products, and manufacturing. Likewise, in the recovery period during the 1980s, the shift to services as the growth sector of the national economy was less beneficial to rural areas than to the urban areas where the growing service activities, such as business and computer services, are located. In addition, government policies of the 1980s, which produced deregulation of transportation and banking industries, for example, are viewed by some observers (e.g., Wilkinson, 1984) as impediments to rural development. Finally, problems in American agriculture in the 1980s—including widespread bankruptcies and weather-related crop failures—focused attention on the plight of America's small and rural towns, thereby helping to bring the rural community crisis to a head.

The upshot is a cluster of rural problems that demand policy action if rural well-being is to be achieved. National data summarized by the Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture (Brown, 1987) raise serious questions about the ability of rural areas to adapt to changing national and international conditions. Slow job growth and high unemployment have been prominent characteristics of the rural economy during the 1980s. Rural employment grew by only 4 percent during the national recovery in the 1980s compared to 13 percent growth in urban employment. More than 1,000 rural counties had annual unemployment rates of 9 percent or more in 1986. Reduced population growth, as noted above, has been one obvious consequence of the rural economic depression, with nearly half of all nonmetropolitan counties losing population in the 1980s—more than two and a half times the number losing population during the 1970s.

Underdeveloped human resources are another consequence. The poverty gap, for example, has been increasing: in the mid-1980s the nonmetropolitan poverty rate was 18.3 percent compared to the metropolitan rate of 12.7 percent, and the former was increasing while the latter was falling. The gap in high school completion persisted at about 10 percentage points during the 1980s and the gap in college completion widened. Particularly in the South, low educational attainment and high illiteracy rates are all too common in rural areas, especially in minority communities. Exceptions to these patterns, of course, must be acknowledged as some rural areas are experiencing growth and prosperity. Still, the overall patterns paint a grim picture of the contemporary rural development situation.

What do these patterns portend for the future of the community and community action in rural America? An answer can be found in an analysis of the effects of economic and demographic conditions on the fundamental elements of the

community, as discussed above. Jobs and income are necessary to support a sufficient population for a local society to develop, and without a local society, community action is retarded. The overall situation in rural areas points to crucial needs that must be addressed if the conditions to support community action are to be put in place. In order to enable community actions to materialize, rural settlements need to improve both job and income opportunities and to increase their share of services and amenities. The keystone of any new rural development legislation must, therefore, focus on the removal of many of the above mentioned major impediments to action.

Empirical Studies of Rural Community Action

Despite these limiting conditions, some evidence exists to support the idea that when latent common interests are aroused, local citizens are capable of responding in a more-or-less unified manner. There is no question that people live together in local settlements, and if local residents can act together in community projects such action will contribute to community well-being. The key question, we would argue, is whether community action can still occur in local settlements; and we would argue that the answer is yes, notwithstanding problems of local mobilization associated with rurality.

Recent literature shows that many of today's small communities do act and act in particular ways. This research, informed mainly by an interactional perspective, makes use of relatively large comparative data bases and examines responses to an array of programs and/or opportunities including participation in the National Flood Insurance Program (Luloff and Wilkinson, 1979), rural manufacturing development (Lloyd and Wilkinson, 1985), and participation in the federal grant system (Martin and Wilkinson, 1984).

For example, Luloff and Wilkinson present evidence that supports the utilization of a field perspective of community action as an approach to the study of action outcomes. Using data on 2,463 municipalities in Pennsylvania and a model incorporating structural and interactional factors as potential explanates of a community's decision to enter the National Flood Insurance Program, support for the influence of both sets of factors is generated.

The most significant factors in their model were indicators of previous community actions and of previous flood experience. The authors interpreted these findings as evidence of the fact that structural measures, at least in this study, were most useful in positing potentials for action. The presence of direct measures of community activeness, which suggests that lasting patterns and capabilities are developed through engagement in community actions, and experiences with past floods, were the best predictors of participation in the flood insurance program.

Similarly, in their study of local participation in the federal grant system, Martin and Wilkinson make use of the structure-conduct-performance framework

(Schmid, 1972) to predict the independent effects of community conduct on per capita receipts of funds for community and economic development. Their model was tested on 640 municipalities in the state of Pennsylvania.

They found that the measures of general ecological structure were significant predictors of the receipt of both community and economic development funds and that the conduct variables contributed relatively little to overall model explanation. However, upon further examination via testing for an interaction effect, a significant relationship was discerned. In communities which were not distressed (a variable comprised of housing, income, population, and employment trends) community action had no effect, but in those places where these indicators were high, community action had decided effects. In essence, Martin and Wilkinson found that in places where community distress was coupled with high levels of community activeness, receipt of federal funding for community and economic development was high. Thus, this study also provided support for the argument that both structural measures (indicators of local ecology) and measures which purport to indicate levels of activeness contribute to a community action model.

Likewise, in their study of rural manufacturing development, Lloyd and Wilkinson present evidence of the role and place of community activeness in the process of location and/or expansion of manufacturing firms in such areas. Using 160 central places in Pennsylvania (which included multiple minor civil divisions per central place area), they built a model which included structural measures (what they termed vertical linkages) and measures of community activeness and solidarity.

The results of the model, in general, supported the earlier work of Luloff and Wilkinson as well as Martin and Wilkinson in that both the structural measures and the community activeness and solidarity measures contributed independently and significantly to an explanation of manufacturing development.

One important implication in Lloyd and Wilkinson's work is that it may not be enough for rural and small communities interested in increasing their manufacturing base, either through expansion of existing firms or attraction of new ones, to make use of outside resources and to make improvements in the local infrastructure. Indeed, this study points to the strong positive relationships between levels of community activeness and solidarity and manufacturing development, and concludes that "the level of local economic well-being tends to increase with community activeness and solidarity" (1985:35).

The finding that local levels of activeness play an important role in the attraction of new or expanding manufacturing firms is also established in the work of Kuehn, Braschler, and Shonwiler (1979), Williams, Sofranko, and Root (1977), and Luloff and Chittenden (1984). Recognizing this pattern helps to highlight the importance of the locality in the industrial capture decision-

making sphere and relates clearly to issues which are internal to the local society.

Our view, in contrast to those who suggest that collective action is neither typical nor a regular occurrence at the local level, is that the community has not disappeared and has not ceased to be an important factor in individual and social well-being (Luloff, 1989; Wilkinson, 1986b). Despite the fact that the community has always been a turbulent field of self-seeking special interest games (Long, 1958), a general sense of well-being emerges when local people act on the real bond of common interest that exists among them by virtue of the shared investment they have in a common place of residence and in their common social life.

How Can Community Action be Cultivated in Rural Areas?

Much of the rhetoric of rural development in contemporary policy and programs at the federal level emphasizes community action as the key to a better life for rural America. For example, the Extension Service's National Priority Initiatives process (Extension Service, 1988) stresses empowerment of rural people, through education on crucial issues, as a means of improving their life chances in the world of tomorrow. The cornerstone of these new initiatives, entitled "Revitalizing Rural America," offers education on six issues to help revitalize rural America "community by community" (Extension Service, 1988:18). The issues include: (1) the diminishing competitiveness of rural areas; (2) dependence on too few income sources; (3) growing service demands accompanied by diminishing resources; (4) adjusting to the impacts of change; (5) need for skilled community leadership; and (6) quality of the natural resource base. The implication is that through education, people in rural communities will be able to address the problems that now threaten rural well-being. While the potential benefits of community education need not be challenged, the underlying assumption that informed residents will mobilize to reverse pervasive patterns of rural decline deserves critical scrutiny. Larger forces than those addressed by the new initiatives stand behind the problems of rural America; these forces will require attention at the societal level prior to the successful implementation of local action. Clearly, education such as that being delivered under the new initiatives is needed, but to be fully useful it must be combined with initiatives at other levels as well.

Perspective on what is needed can be gained by recognizing that community action, though a natural tendency in local social life everywhere, is seriously impeded, if not ruled out entirely, by extant trends in many rural areas. Initiatives are needed at three levels to encourage community action in the face of these trends. The first level is that addressed by the Extension initiatives—efforts to assist local actors. This is an essential level because community action, when all is said and done, consists of the actions of local actors. Here, improvements in human capital resources are a necessity. In part, this may require transfer of funds, in terms of

training and assistance programs. It will also require efforts aimed at enhancing the local community's ability to retain its native citizenry—that is, increased efforts will be needed to stem outmigration of those in the entry and mid-life work groups. In order to accomplish such a goal, cooperative partnerships between the private sector and county, state, and federal governments will need to be formed to increase local job opportunities. Further, creative initiatives, including tax incentive programs for the training and hiring of unemployed and underemployed personnel as well as guaranteed postsecondary education for those who finish high school would help address the growing discrepancy between rates of illiteracy and low educational attainment characteristic of rural and urban areas. Where an educated labor force is available, opportunities for enhancement of local economic conditions will occur.

The second level is in the larger society. Initiatives are needed to articulate and implement community action in rural areas as a policy goal. This is to say that intervention is needed at the federal level to counter the forces that depress rural well-being. The traditional “bricks and mortar” approaches of past federal programs will no longer suffice. Rural America needs more than an infrastructural transfusion; new buildings and capital improvements alone will not contribute to successful rural development. Rather, attention must be given to the removal of existing impediments. This includes the decoupling of traditional agricultural policies from those aimed at helping rural communities and a reexamination of the results of previous deregulation policies as major first steps.

The third level is in science. We simply know too little about the processes of rural development and community action to advise actors at local and national levels on appropriate actions and interventions. The rekindling of interest in community action as a rural development strategy calls renewed attention to gaps in the research base. Closing this gap is a necessary step toward articulating an appropriate policy at the national level to provide backup and support for efforts at the local level. This will require evaluation research to be included, from the onset, as a stated objective in all rural development efforts. It will also necessitate the development of a menu of activities as opposed to the development of one master strategy for all of rural America.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the development of strategies to promote community action and social well-being in rural America is more a question of will and commitment than of means. The means exist or can be made to exist, we would argue, if the national will were to be focused clearly on rural well-being as a goal. The fact that this has not happened is displayed clearly in the history of rural policy in the United States. Government has responded from time to time to particular rural problems and pressures, but there has never been a coherent statement of long term goals and

objectives. Foremost among reasons for this is the lack of a clear rationale for a policy to promote rural welfare in an essentially urban age. Potential rural contributions to national economic well-being and to other national concerns (such as protection of rural heritage and environment) might be cited, but without a clear vision of optimum distributions of economic activity and population in space such arguments are likely to evoke little consensus. Urban malaise stimulated rural development legislation in the early 1970s, but the effects were shortlived. Equity—for 63 million rural Americans—becomes a call to arms for rural development now and then, but it appears that its value has little staying power in competition with other forces that dominate the modern policy arena. Also, as numerous observers have lamented, in the political arena rural America no longer can be counted as a major power. What then can be the rationale for insisting that ways be sought to promote community action and social well-being in the troubled countryside?

The answer should be sought, we maintain, in the idea that the community is a central element in social well-being but one threatened by contemporary trends in both rural and urban settings. In this paper we have concentrated on rural problems, but an equally grim picture could be painted of prospects for social well-being at the other extreme of spatial agglomeration. The optimum range for community action and social well-being probably falls somewhere between these extremes—in rural-urban fields of medium scale. Yet, this is speculation; what is needed is a serious investigation to give direction to national policy.

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The Elusiveness of Rural Development Theory and Policy: Domestic and Third World Perspectives Joined

Ted K. Bradshaw

ABSTRACT

Rural development in both the Third World and the United States suffers from many perceived failures and the lack of a theoretically rich conceptual framework by which effective rural development policies can be fashioned. Drawing upon Third World development literature, a perspective for domestic rural development is suggested. Development is defined by interdependence of increasingly specialized resources in production and the interdependence of relations among differentiated social groups including the rural disadvantaged. Effective programs must expand both resource utilization and restructure social relations that hinder development.

Perspectives on Development

The solution to rural underdevelopment remains elusive despite an abundance of efforts to help the poor, improve education and health, build housing, and create jobs. With due respect to the fact that development has been beneficial in many particular instances, an overall assessment must conclude that rural solutions in both the developed and underdeveloped world have failed to slow the descent of rural people into the grips of poverty, let alone reach the stated development goals of eliminating rural poverty or reducing rural inequality (see for example, Rondinelli and Ruddle, 1978; Seligson, 1984; Lewis, 1986). In some cases the rural poor have suffered from development efforts, and even worse, the same kinds of development failures recur in county after county, year

after year (Johnston and Clark, 1982:9). Rural development has turned out to be more difficult than was expected or believed, a problem receiving attention in both domestic and Third World rural development literature.¹

Despite selected successes, rural development in both domestic and Third World settings is in a period of self evaluation and reflection. Critiques explore reasons why programs failed, why we have not learned from successes, or why successful programs have not been replicated in other areas. Ironically, we also are discovering that successful rural development has resulted only partially from direct intervention, but more often from national and international events over which rural developers have no influence such as agricultural prices, political instability, or technological innovations. As well, nondevelopmental policies and programs such as social security, health, or justice often have had an unanticipated positive effect on development (Bradshaw and Blakely, 1987; Hirschl and Summers, 1982).

Rural development efforts in the United States as well as in the Third World continue to search for organizing concepts and theories to guide them. In the Third World the current emphasis has shifted from macroeconomic strategies to efforts toward building better ways to integrate local participation into development projects and to accomplish projects at a local level that make full use of local resources. This ferment finds its parallel in concern about rural development in the United States. While an order of magnitude less desperate, the policy emphasis has shifted from an industrial attraction strategy to local initiatives making use of a wider array of human and natural resources (Blakely, 1989).

Rural development theory and policy for advanced societies will benefit from reflection on Third World development experience. Many concerns are shared, but domestic rural development policy analysis has not built on what is known about development in the Third World. Domestic and Third World developers have worked in isolation from each other. Perhaps by reason of training, by the peculiarities of work environment, by the specialization of channels of communication, or by the boundaries of professional association, people trying to solve the problems of underdevelopment in Appalachia (for example) rarely share their experiences with the people trying to solve the brutal and exposed problems of underdevelopment in India, Africa, Asia, or elsewhere.

¹For a contrasting perspective, Lewis (1986) argues that development efforts are responsible for large GNP gains throughout the Third World and the potential of development efforts has scarcely been tapped. This may be true, but as Seligson (1984:402) concludes, "each passing day finds the world inhabited by a larger number of people who live in absolute poverty, even though the proportion of the world's population in absolute poverty may be declining."

This essay is directed toward rural developers in advanced countries who could benefit from the conceptual and theoretical contributions of those working in the Third World.² This exercise is not intended as a full review of a very large literature but as a useful policy strategy. Given the relatively easier task of domestic rural development, the lessons of the Third World can break the conceptual bottleneck rural development is in today.

Two Third World Development Paradigms

The Third World rural development literature embraces a huge number of competing philosophies, ideologies, and strategies. In spite of a number of classification schemes, Third World development strategies are organized around two hotly debated paradigms (see for example, Wilber and Jameson, 1984; Evans and Stephens, 1988). The first is a classical economic model focusing on production and investment and the second is a conflict perspective focusing on restructuring patterns of dependence and control.

At the end of World War II the emphasis was on helping underdeveloped countries obtain enough economic and human resources to have self-sustaining development. Rostow (1960) suggested that with assistance, an underdeveloped society would reach the "take off" point, at which time it would become integrated with the developed world. Modernization became the buzz word, and the expansion of the gross national product (GNP) the indicator. However, as the evidence failed to show that underdeveloped countries would "take off," a sustained and pervasive theory of economic management evolved. Five year plans were drawn to coordinate efforts to unleash the potential of underdeveloped countries, and regional economists dominated development discussions with theories about how to maximize growth and minimize waste. Davies (1984:915) summarized the approach:

Third World countries should endeavour to integrate their economies as quickly as possible into the world market network, and this would be best achieved through government-led, export oriented industrialization in conjunction with commitments from the industrialized countries to develop trade, grant aid, and encourage private investment in the LDC's.

The classical model focused on the role of import substitution, export promotion, liberalization of trade, rationalization of exchange rates, development of industrial infrastructures, and the best utilization of aid.

²The utility of the insights from domestic rural development to the Third World is not developed here.

Improved agricultural practices and technology were promoted (more recently) as a means to meet "basic needs."

The problem with the classical approach was that it neglected the political effect of outside (usually developed) countries. Frank (1967) and others in a Neo-Marxian tradition argued that the problems of underdeveloped countries could not be solved with classical economic processes because the developed countries systematically caused poor countries to be "underdeveloped." To some extent, they argued, development is not a problem of economics but of political mobilization to reduce dependency. The political economy paradigm focuses on the nature of the process of development, not economic growth. The key issue of who controls development becomes central.

The search for an appropriate Third World development model has not been won by either of the competing models. Most recently, the analytic effort has been to join the two traditions (see Higgott, 1983:chap. 4; Nafziger, 1979; Evans and Stephens, 1988) and to consider ways of achieving growth with local control. The contribution of the classical economics model is to draw our attention to the problems of *resources* and their effective utilization. The conflict perspective calls our attention to the problems of the structure of *relations* that hinder development. The reconciliation of the two involves the need to increase resource availability as a means to greater economic capacity and to expand networks of control so that social and economic exchanges are not based on dependency but on interdependence. Integrated development and the "growth with equity" programs have reflected this accommodation.

The problem of expanding the interdependence of rural economies and social groups is more visible in the Third World context than the domestic, yet it is an important lesson for rural development in the United States. The popular domestic rural development/industrial development strategy to encourage resource exploitation, economic growth, firm location, and job training for businesses is based on many of the same principles as the macroeconomic strategies used in the Third World. Likewise, domestic community development perspectives emphasize local organization and capacity as a vehicle for mobilizing resources. Community development strategies are in competition with economic models over deciding what is an effective use of resources and balancing the perceived interests of both development agencies and the population. Finally, recent literature in the United States has tried to integrate the strategies of industrial growth with community development for local and rural areas (Blakely, 1989).

What is Development?

Development is one of the most imprecisely defined terms in broad use. Hundreds of articles define development in different ways, and rural development

shares few definitional characteristics with other development disciplines such as economic development, political development, and community development. A theoretically fertile concept of development is needed in order for development policy to be more clearly articulated and implemented.

In spite of its elusive quality, recent definitional efforts seem to be converging on several broad aspects of what is meant by development and what is not. For example, development is not simply an increase in the GNP (see Stewart and Streeten, 1984), though increasing well being is desired nearly universally. Being developed is not a single end-state for all societies, nor is it a fixed evolutionary path (see Cardoso and Faletto, 1979), but it is relative to each culture. It is not simply a process independent of goals, though the development process is central to effective development. It is not well represented by a singular focus on major international developmental programs and ideologies that seek to reverse patterns of dependency, establish agriculture as a means for poor people to gain basic necessities, or build patterns of local participation. An effective concept of development needs to embrace multiple perspectives.

Differentiation. Sociology has much to contribute here. A long tradition has called attention to the fact that development is differentiation (Smelser, 1959). As a society becomes more developed, its people are employed in more specialized roles, goods are more finely processed, and organizations are more functionally specific. With differentiation comes greater capacity and well being. As Landau (1972) points out, the concept of development "precisely means increased structural differentiation and functional specificity," which are the prerequisites for increased scale of performance. Development occurs when more highly differentiated resources and inputs are utilized by more differentiated organizations. While there are many variations on this theme, they are "minor or derivative" (Landau, 1972a: 161).

Interdependence. The concept of differentiation is closely related to social interdependence, which is best defined as the complexity of relations among increasingly differentiated units. The breadth of Third World development experience points out that it is not enough to set about creating more differentiated resources, products, organizations, and control systems, but that the very structure of these relations becomes critical. Put another way, development is indicated by differentiation, but its smooth functioning is conditioned by patterns of interdependence. Interdependence is patterns of exchange—resources, legitimacy, sanctions, and payment. Interdependence increases as these exchanges become more complex in structure (from direct to sequential, to reciprocal and matrix), more controlling (from transfers to regulated exchanges, to conditional), more highly aggregated (from individual/individual exchanges to structured organizations) and in relationships that need to be sustained over long periods of time. Thus, a social system is more interdependent when more complex groups are interwoven in an overlapping, sequential, and reciprocal web of exchange governed by negotiated

rules (Bradshaw and Blakely, 1979). Dependency results when the exchange favors one party over another, generally limiting total system exchange.

Premises of Development

At the root of the contribution of Third World analysis to our purposes are four findings so basic that they are nearly premises of development; and they provide a foundation for ongoing analysis. First, economic growth favoring the poor and less developed regions is not self starting, self sustaining, or able to overcome almost Malthusian problems that of their own momentum make conditions worse rather than better. No credible evidence exists that the "development problem" will take care of itself, at least in a short or medium time frame. An associated recurring finding in the development literature is that "regional imbalances tend to grow rather than to diminish if matters are left to the free play of the market." (De Kadt, 1974:7)

In the language of development introduced here, the premise suggests that differentiation and interdependence are not easily produced. They are costly for an underdeveloped area, and exchanges always favor entities with abundant resources and low needs. When dealing with rural entities with few resources it is clear that appropriately constructed exchange networks need to be established along with more valued and differentiated items with which to strengthen exchange positions. Without continuing effort, exchange positions in less developed areas will erode because others have more knowledge and channels through which to strengthen their position.

Secondly, in underdeveloped as well as developing countries, the urban advantage relative to the rural areas is so strong that it promotes urban economic concentration. The ability to organize, centralize, and control generally derives from urban areas. Rural people in most developing countries are more numerous, but they are also more dispersed, poor, inarticulate, and unorganized. Consequently, disparities between urban and rural living standards tend to diverge, driving rural depopulation (Lipton, 1982).

Interdependence patterns more easily operate where there is the greatest proximity and concentration of people and resources involved in various exchanges. The defining character of "rural" for policy purposes is low density population and small scale social organization, factors that mean economies of scale are not realized (Bradshaw and Blakely, 1987). Especially in underdeveloped areas where distance reducing technologies (transportation, telecommunications, etc.) are inadequate, it is easy to see how development will concentrate in urban areas.

The third finding offers some hope: it is possible to overcome the bias of developed areas and invest money and time in rural development with positive and favorable results. It is not easy, but investments lead to pay offs. Although failure to reach ambitious goals is the norm, despair is not warranted. For example,

investments paid off in the economic growth of Taiwan, Singapore, South Korea, and Hong Kong (see Gold, 1986; O'Hearn, 1989), much of the Third World has reached food self-sufficiency, and thousands of innovative community level projects in even the most depressed areas have relieved human misery (Korten, 1980). These examples prove that it is possible to assist development, and that doing something is usually better than doing nothing.

In addition, there is a growing sense that putting money into rural areas has a pay off similar to or even greater than expenditures in urban areas. Investments in rural areas can help improve wages and living standards of rural people, better utilize natural resources, and create the base for a regional network of small enterprises. (Investments that only benefit outside investors, however, may not be useful for rural development.) The lack of rural investment has meant that the problems of rural areas have been transferred to slums in cities. In major urban areas of developing countries, as in Mexico City, the population crush is nearly unmanageable. The high investment in urban infrastructure required to accommodate rural depopulation may be greater than the investments necessary to make it possible for rural areas to remain viable. The primary example of a viable rural program to slow urbanization is China, though the results of that experiment are not yet clear.

Finally, the case has been made for cultural relativity rather than a fixed concept of progress. The goal of development is not external to society, but integral to it, and when external goals are imposed on a society they tend to be unreachable or may even lead to undesirable consequences. Development is not something that is "done to" a society, but it is at best a process by which a society reaches its own goals. Development in this perspective does not anticipate continual outside assistance but self-reliance. While the elimination of poverty and social misery is generally common to all development efforts, each society makes its own trade-offs between this goal and other goals, between different ways of reaching the goal, and between competing visions of the long-term future. Moreover, attention to cultural conditions is more than just a value appropriate to development, it is practical and efficient as well.

Three Important Lessons from the Third World

The process and efforts of rural development in the Third World have many lessons for developers in rural backwaters of developed countries. Three of these lessons are selected for exploration here. First, the tension between the two traditions of Third World development, and their selected variables, leads to a categorization of development needs for different societies or communities. Second, the emphasis of one tradition of Third World rural development on dependency provides an important lesson for rural communities everywhere. Finally, Third World development provides a cautionary policy lesson: the

development process is beset with uncertainty and a comprehensive solution is not viable.

Development Problems Distinguished

The great variety of Third World situations and responses provides an extensive catalog of development problems. Building upon the two paradigms of development reviewed earlier, a typology of development strategies may be created. The problem faced by the classical economists is one of moving from limited resources and capacity to specialized resources and differentiated patterns of production. The problem faced by the focus on relations and control is one of moving from outside control or dependency to structures of exchange that include the majority of the poor population. At the risk of generalizing too broadly, one can argue that these two problems are universal in an interdependent world and that the problem of what is available for exchange is separable from the problem of the terms and character of exchange. The high visibility of the two traditions in Third World development calls this distinction clearly to mind.

The two development perspectives are actually interrelated. People will be better off to the extent that: (1) they have resources (products, human skills, infrastructure capacity); and (2) the ability to control the terms of exchange and trade of these resources for other things they need. Specialized and differentiated resources without the ability to benefit from them are no more useful to a developing rural area than participatory structures which have nothing to provide.

CONTROL WITHIN
SOCIAL STRUCTURE

RESOURCE SPECIALIZATION

Constrained, Limited

Abundant, Integrated

Isolated, dependent

1 Survival

2 Exploited
Colonial

Open,
Interdependent

3 Inefficient

4 Self-sustaining

Figure 1
Typology of Developmental Problems

Based on this formulation, it is easy to see that rural areas face different types of development problems based on the historical condition of the particular society or area with regard to their resource availability and capacity to control. These two aspects of development may be organized into a simple four cell table (figure 1) that shows typical development problems faced by areas in which resources are either constrained or abundant, and in which the social structure is either isolated and dependent or open and interdependent.

Cell 1, the classic case of an underdeveloped rural area, lacks both resources and the "social infrastructure" to either get resources or to participate in exchanges. The main problem is one of survival, a pressing crisis that takes up all available resources and organizational capacity. Local based participatory programs are ideally suited for this type of situation because they tap individual aspirations, pool resources, control exploitation, and build lasting skills and patterns of exchange. Outside help is usually needed, and gains should be balanced between continued investment and local consumption. (Irrigation and housing programs in the Third World are good examples of successful programs.) These projects are expensive and local; they depend largely on the skill and persistence of project leaders, and they are not conducive to the rapid reduction of poverty. Nonetheless, the laborious process of building a flow of resources while, at the same time, building a network of exchange must be done at a community level through much developer intervention.

Cell 2, is a society with abundant resources but is isolated and dependent. Typically, this is an export oriented area exploited by outsiders, and the main problem is one of motivating people to create new outlets for its capacity. It is often the case that resource availability in these areas is highly specialized in one area (e.g., products) but underdeveloped in other areas (such as managerial skills). Rural communities facing these problems need to seek alternatives to the existing constraining patterns of exploitation. Programs to do this are often politically sensitive, though development does not need to involve national political issues. Community development strategies, especially those that develop leadership, are essential because organizational capacity is lacking.

Cell 3 includes societies or communities with another form of unbalanced development. These societies are inefficient. They have extensive social organizations but they have limited resources with which to participate in exchanges. The concept goes further to include societies with good internal markets but limited goods to sell. Programs for this development problem involve economic development strategies that create a flow of resources and capacities within the available institutional structure rather than industrial location efforts which simply bring in outsider firms and destroy local control and capacity.

Finally, in Cell 4 are found self sustaining societies that are neither trapped by limited resources nor dependency. They have created specialized resources, and invested in human as well as physical capital, within a functionally

differentiated social organization that is diverse and interdependent. Development strategies in this context include what has been termed "integrated development," though effective programs include more than just a combination of resource and human skills—they also include major efforts to restructure social and cultural patterns for development. The development problem in these societies is often seen as entrepreneurial in that the major objective is innovation.

In many ways the goal of development is to move from cell 1 to cell 4 without getting trapped in either 2 or 3. Intervention policies need to help achieve this balance.

Development is the Reduction of Dependence

Change resulting from interventions in organizations, firms, and communities is developmental only if its effect is improvement of individual well being, rather than an internal goal which is an end in itself. If the focus is on individual well being, then we can make the assumption that the objective of rural development policies should be to *reduce dependence*, by ensuring both independence and interdependence. Development is thus conceived as a theory of how to reduce dependency situations in which a person or group is at a disadvantage in relations with other persons or groups.

Third World dependency theory has gone a long way to explain how international relations disadvantage underdeveloped areas. The problem is not just in the fact that profits are removed; the local capacity is diminished as branch plants and other transnational corporate activities in underdeveloped regions block local participation. In a recent article, O'Hearn (1989) examined post-war economic development in Ireland, which since mid-1950s has pursued an export oriented approach, enticing foreign plants through policies of no taxation, free trade, and no or few restrictions on the firm's operation. Foreign plants were seen as "a substitute for—not a complement to-domestic industry" (O'Hearn, 1989:580). He points out that this strategy of not integrating the foreign plants into the domestic economy is in sharp contrast to the strategy of the developing countries such as South Korea and Taiwan which utilized foreign industry in a controlled way. The failure to avoid dependence on the foreign firms in Ireland led to both slow economic growth and rising inequality. Although not quite Third World, Ireland illustrates the problem rural communities face when they become too dependent on outside firms, which could be interdependent with the local economy if policy has been favorable to such an initiative.

Thus, if the problem of underdevelopment is the lack of control and, as a consequence, dependency, the solution is viable alternatives. This means alternative means of transportation, alternative ways of making a living, alternative markets for production, and other alternatives. The literature on the Third World

makes clear that the process of providing alternatives is difficult, that many alternatives are not real to the people who need them (e.g., they remain afraid or uninformed), that many alternatives compete with each other in the development process (e.g., too much concentration on political alternatives that hampers efforts to increase economic alternatives), or that some alternatives such as massive dams or farm tractors may not benefit the deprived people for whom they were intended.

Managing Uncertainty

A critical lesson to be learned from the literature on Third World development is that development strategies are more an art than a science and are best tailored to individual community and cultural situations. In contrast, comprehensive formulas fail in the face of specific problem solving. Korten (1980), drawing on extensive experience throughout the Third World, admonishes developers and development policy to learn from past efforts and to design programs that are part of a holistically perceived learning process as opposed to a bureaucratically mandated blueprint. In such a strategy, the people being assisted as well as the administrators are engaged in a collective learning experience based on extensive local control and participation. However, for Korten, as well as most other reviewers of the development process, it remains easier to evaluate why projects have succeeded than why they have failed, even though there is much more to learn from the study of the failings of projects (including those that are nominally successful).

Development does not fit the concept of a neatly bound problem for which there is a definitive answer. Johnston and Clark are correct to point out that development is best conceived of as a "mess" following Ackoff's phrase (1974) because development involves:

a staggering variety of people and organizations, all pulling, pushing, and otherwise interacting with each other in pursuit of their various interests. Turning messes into problems about which something constructive can be done is one way of viewing the central task of policy analysis (Johnston and Clark, 1982:11).

If we view development as a mess, it is fruitless to assume that the goal of development programs is to find the one most efficient way to use resources, to devise formulas that target closely and systematically the areas to receive investments, to schedule projects that must be completed before other projects, or to favor strategies that will have the maximum measurable results. As Landau and Chisholm (1988) point out, such policy optimism is unwarranted, and a better strategy is to be pessimistic about the ability of policy (such as development

policy) to achieve its goals. If the assumption is that any one program will largely fail, then the best strategy is to have multiple, redundant programs, some of which can be expanded if they seem to be beneficial or abandoned quickly if they are not. (See Landau, 1972; Landau and Chisholm, 1988).

Third World development literature warns that comprehensive programs are not viable. In the first place, the development problems are so different from one place to another that a comprehensive strategy that does not accommodate these differences is bound to fail. Efforts to centralize development are often misguided since developing areas predominantly lack agreement on the values to be pursued or the techniques to be employed (often both); in such cases centralization increases the risks of failure. A current movement in development circles of "participatory development" in which greater reliance is placed on local agenda setting and implementation, with outside assistance, counters this tendency.

Conclusion

This paper has concentrated on those conceptual problems of development illustrated by studies in the Third World. Hundreds of practical articles are also available which emphasize practical issues. In general, these suggest that developers in the Third World have a greater awareness of the need to sustain their efforts for a long time, to seek incremental improvements for very complex issues, to integrate various types of solutions, and to build networks of poor people from the ground up. They sense the interdependence of development and people, as opposed to the tight rationality of specialized programs that they have to administer. Domestic programs violate many of these principles. They have short program cycles, seek simple single factor solutions (e.g., rural banking reform), fail to coordinate development efforts (training, natural resource, infrastructure, and other programs do not get packaged properly), and they have weak involvement with the people who are to be served.

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