

# Village Studies: A Reply

by Mick Moore\*

My main criticisms of Anne McManus' paper fall into three groups:-

A. There are criticisms of the dubious intellectual honesty found at several points in her paper: direct misquotations, distortions, etc.

B. Criticisms of deficient understanding: there are points which one would not normally expect to be misunderstood by someone who has spent nearly a year working on the project.

C. There are important and substantive issues which are not specified or discussed clearly.

## A. Intellectual Honesty

1. In para. 1, Anne talks of the "Liptonian 'universal' definition of a 'village' as ...". The 'definition' in this case is a distorted quotation from our project description. (1) The actual sentence begins: "For our purposes ... a village is a ...". This is a far cry from a "universal definition" to which "reality obstinately refuses to conform!"

More importantly, there is now broad agreement in VSP that the issue of 'definition' of villages is a 'red

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\* Mick Moore is a Research Assistant working on the Village Studies Programme at IDS.

(1) *The Village Studies Project*, IDS Mimeo, March 1971. Available from Barry Peters at IDS. A similar quotation can be found in one of our conference papers: J. Connell, *The VSP Village*, IDS mimeo, 1970.

herring'. The word 'village' is a 'cluster concept', describing entities with 'family resemblances' in the sense described by Wittgenstein.(1) Anne has had access to the draft of the paper in which this issue is discussed(2), and indeed quotes this paper later in her own article. It would be unrealistic to expect all members of a research project to agree all the time; in this case there is probably complete agreement and therefore an 'orthodoxy' to attack - but let us please attack the orthodoxy and not one tentative view on this issue put forward by one project member during a period of debate some time ago.

2. In para. 2, Anne says: "It is contended that differences between villages rather than between individuals or social macrocosms ... explain the varying success of different sorts of developmental efforts". The context clearly implies that this is the accepted view of VSP members; this is not so. Indeed, it would be clearly ridiculous for anyone to hold the view that inter-village differences explain all variance in all cases; certainly no-one on VSP, apart from Anne, has ever put forward this view. We merely claim that we think it worth testing the proposition that in certain environments, certain types of inter-village differences explain to an important and identifiable extent differences in the success of some projects. I personally suspect very strongly that patterns of resource availability and use (land, cropping patterns etc.) in large part explain population patterns and thus receptivity to family planning programmes at the level of the individual village in India. I certainly do not think that one could, in the same way, explain to any important degree the differential success of agricultural extension agencies in villages. (This issue is discussed in more detail below.)

3. Para 6, Anne deliberately treats as non-existent both long discussions (in which she has participated) and a long section in our paper(3) on the vital issue of the comparability of villages in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

4. Para 6. The last sentence quotes a part of this paper(4) totally out of context. In our paper, we constructed a composite model of what we consider to be the

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(1) *Philosophical Investigations* (translated G. Anscombe), Blackwell, 1958, paras. 66-67.

(2) M. Lipton and M. P. Moore, *The Methodology of Village Studies*, IDS mimeo, forthcoming.

(3) *ibid.*

(4) *Ibid.*

important features of 'villages' (i.e. 'things' called 'villages') in LDCs; the focus of the model was on relationships between the village and the national (or international) economy, society and culture. Anne directly quotes one of the implications of our model and calls it an assumption of the project. She is surely aware of the difference between 'reality' and a model intended to illustrate relationships between certain aspects of 'reality'. The distinction occurs in most introductory courses to social science.

5. Para 7: We very much agree with Anne about *minifundia* in Chile; we explain why, in some detail, in our paper<sup>(1)</sup>, which she has read.

6. Para. 8, first sentence: Anne has read the paragraph of our paper in which we attack a very silly argument for not doing village studies (i.e. that villages are not totally isolated and that therefore one must study a larger unit; I have heard this argued), and then claimed that we have put this forward not only as a reason for doing village studies, but as the sole reason. She is of course well aware that all the major project papers have given detailed reasons for studying villages. (See below for more on this point.)

7. Para: 9, first sentence: No one in VSP has ever claimed that the village is a "unitary behavioural unit"; if this means anything, I suppose it means villagers sitting under a tree and discussing all issues until unanimous agreement is reached on all action to be taken. Several VSP papers have specifically pointed out the silliness of any such type of suggestion. We are interested in villagers as groups of individuals (or households) which are involved in particularly 'intense' networks of socio-economic relationships. It follows, as we have made clear in all VSP papers, that we consider the intra-village distribution of resources as key to our own analysis: villages of small peasant farmers with near-equal land-holdings are very different from villages where a small group of landlords/traders/moneylenders exerts near-monopoly control of certain key socio-economic sectors. One really loses patience with Anne's silly claim that we are ignoring the issues of distribution of either resources or of 'benefits'. She has read quite a few village studies and knows that studies with no data on distribution of resources and income are both rare and largely useless from the point of view of VSP.

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(1) *op. cit.*

With the techniques Anne has used, it would be easy to take any project description and make nonsense of it.

B. Deficient Understanding

1. Anne somewhat confuses the aims of VSP. In the long term, we hope this project will contribute towards the production of guidelines for inter-village distribution of 'developmental inputs' - schools, roads, fertilisers, employment projects etc. We believe this to be a very important issue in development planning. Our belief is based on the observed fact that different 'inputs' do appear to meet with very different rates of success of different villages. (For example, I strongly suspect that the 'success' of credit co-operatives is closely related to the intra-village distribution of resources, especially land.)

In the short term, we recognise that our data and resources are very limited. Our aims are restricted accordingly. We hope to be able to establish correlations between different variables at the village level in the fields of labour utilisation, migration, and, hopefully, demography. What are the village characteristics associated with high levels of permanent out-migration to towns? Distribution and availability of land? Education? What variables are associated with high levels of labour utilisation? Cropping patterns? Distribution of land? Health? Convincing correlations would establish strong cases for concentrating certain types of input on certain villages, i.e. employment projects to prevent migration would be sensible in some types of villages but not others. Re-surveys, a certain amount of intuition, field work of our own, but above all, field work by others, will, we hope, enable us to move from correlation to analysis of causality. Our relationships with research institutes in LDCs already doing village studies are a major concern; these institutions have supplied us with much of our raw material; we hope to help give them some sort of framework within which they can direct research in future and thus put an end to the meaningless ritual of data collection for its own sake.(1)

2. Anne appears to support an extreme empiricist view that we should not attempt to test general hypotheses about villages until every single empirical case has been investigated. In para. 6, talking of the relationship of village to nation state, she says: "these relationships

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(1) See Lipton and Moore, *op. cit.*, forthcoming.

need specific empirical investigation in each case ..."  
Good luck! There are said to be 600,000 villages in India alone! We prefer to test our hypotheses in what I would consider a much more economical fashion, i.e. to use the already available but unused data, some of it of very high quality indeed.

3. At the bottom of para. 7, Anne makes the very curious claim that the fact that VSP has had to 'abandon' Latin America and East Africa "involves dropping the basic comparative framework". Curious not only because these two areas comprise only about one fifth of the population of the less developed world (i.e. Latin America, Africa and non-Communist Asia)(1), but also because it seems to suggest that no exercise can be 'comparative' unless it covers all possible cases. In what sense is a project covering West Africa, West Asia, South Asia and South East Asia not comparative?

#### C. The Substantive Issues

There are some important issues hinted (or shouted?) at in Anne's paper, but not presented in any systematic fashion.

There is the issue of the level of aggregation at which it makes sense to study any given phenomenon - at the level of the international system, the nation, the market, the village, the individual? The village is clearly not the correct unit for the study of some phenomena. In VSP we believe that in most LDCs (in terms of population, and especially South Asia, parts of South East Asia, the settled areas of West Asia, most of West and 'soudanian' Africa) the village is the right (not the only) level at which to approach issues of labour utilisation, population patterns and out-migration. I also believe it to be the correct level at which to study the effects of certain types of institution, such as primary schools and co-operative credit societies.

Our belief in the usefulness of the village unit in certain cases is based on the observation (in the field and in village studies) that, in the above-mentioned areas, (a) the village is to an important extent an independent

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(1) 323 million (Latin America, Burundi, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, Somalia, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia) out of a total of 1,684 million (1968)

socio-economic system. The vast majority of the 'transactions' (economic, social, political) of most villagers are internal to the village system; (1) and (b) the village has limited and identifiable linkages with the 'outside world' in normal times. One can trace these linkages (road and transport network, residence in village of 'outsiders', proportion of output marketed, number of villagers regularly working outside the village), and then build them into one's analysis. Thus one is broadly arguing that, in certain types of environment, one can predict from a certain number of 'village variables' (say, cropping pattern, distribution of land, extra-village employment pattern) the pattern of labour utilisation in certain villages in 'normal' times, i.e. in the absence of large changes in the 'external environment'. A public works programme in the vicinity may have a very slight and transient effect on this pattern; it may take the industrialisation of the local economy to effect a major change.

Lastly, with regard to the issue of international comparison, we are merely arguing that we think it worthwhile to test propositions of the following sort: that, for example, the 'external environments' in, say, Mali and Rajasthan are of such small importance in explaining patterns of labour utilisation in remote, small, land-surplus, and remote, small, land-shortage, millet growing villages, that one can sensibly attempt to assume them absent. A conclusion that one has to use a 'dummy variable' to represent 'being in Mali' would be of great interest, but would not vitiate the basic point about inter-village comparisons.

The most important question in relation to VSP is the level of generality of any results which we produce. I am certain that we can produce, in the field of labour utilisation and demography, results which are of sufficient specificity both to be useful and to be not in any sense 'obvious'.

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(1) These issues are discussed in detail in Lipton and Moore, *op. cit.*