

Packaging, Processing, Promotion: Political Economy of Food
Modernisation

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The distinctive elements of modernised food systems are processing, packaging and promotion. A simple example is branded (eg. Nestle) highly advertised, tinned condensed milk sold throughout a country's urban and more affluent rural areas in contrast to a local dairy's bottled fresh milk sold with minimal promotion in a limited area near the dairy. On the production side the Nestle tinning plant (like the dairy) will be near the cows that supply it, but by definition it will not be near all retail outlets stocking it, and may even be outside the country which then imports the condensed milk.

The Logics of Modernisation

From a capitalist firm's logic modernisation is logical because packaging and processing backed by promotion allow wider profit margins than can be obtained on most unprocessed or limited processed goods. They also allow marketing larger quantities over a broader area with the twin effect of genuine resources saving from technical economics of scale and genuine oligapolistic economies of scale from limiting the number of potential competitors to those with substantial capital and knowledge bases.

From the technological logic point of view processing and packaging

(and promotion if one includes soft technologies) also have physical attractions. They reduce physical loss (or at any rate loss beyond the producer - P/P/P systems often have very high rejection/destruction rates in respect to crops offered for purchase); they allow mass production; they make possible creation and identification (to the consumer) of new products.

Consumer logic also favours modernisation (or can be appealed to as well as manipulated by it) at least up to a point. Modernisation does allow provision of a greater variety of foods, more stably over the year, with more predictability of quality (ie at least near elimination of totally unsatisfactory) and in forms requiring less preparation time and/or affording greater portability (eg packaged sliced bread versus flour-yeast-water-salt on preparation time, and versus maize porridge or boiled, roasted cassava on portability).

Agents of Change

Food system modernisation is spearheaded by medium to large sized firms centred either on the processing/packaging or on the wholesaling/retailing stage (rarely on actual primary food or input production). These may or may not be TNC's - there is some evidence from Central American studies that the initial stages are usually carried out by local firms using imported machinery and methods which are later bought up by TNCs when their markets are large enough to be attractive parts of a global milk products, breakfast cereal, tinned goods, confectionary, frozen food, or biscuit empire.

At several levels it makes little difference whether TNCs or domestic firms are dominant. The effects discussed below on consumers and producers will vary little. However, at the national level TNCs

will tend to "export" a higher proportion of surplus (as dividends, trade mark fees, technology charges, tied sales of inputs overcharging etc) and may have a tendency to import more and buy/process less locally. Therefore, they will tend to have a less positive/more negative impact on national production and balance of payments transactions.

P-P-P and the Consumer

The positive impact of food modernisation on the consumer has been noted above. However, there are less desirable results.

First, packaging-processing-promotion usually raise the cost per calorie substantially more than economies of scale and distribution reduce it.* Condensed milk costs more per unit than fresh, potato chips than potatoes and vegetable oil, tomato paste than tomatoes.

Second, many modern foods are rather dubious from a nutritional value optic, absolutely and even more in respect to other foods squeezed out of consumer diets. The most evident absolute example is Coca Cola; taken as a group "fast foods" may have the greatest impact on shifting diets.

Third, at least as promoted and used under Third World conditions, some modern foods constitute serious dangers to health and life. The most notorious examples are currently in the infant formula and babyfood cluster of products.

* Some parts of modernisation - eg. supermarkets - do reduce cost to the consumer, especially in high wage economies. However, the overall impact is still normally cost raising even in the North, and much more so in low wage Southern economies.

And the Poor Consumer

Modernised food systems - to the extent they do impinge significantly on his eating habits - have a particularly negative impact on the poor consumer. First, he cannot afford to substitute higher cost, labour saving (ie preprocessed) foods because to do so reduces total nutrient value available. Second, because poor household's total food budgets are limited, shifts to convenience foods almost inevitably change (and worsen from a nutritional point of view) food basket makeup. As men are most likely to buy and eat convenience and fast foods, they may also reduce absolutely food availability to wives and children.

These two considerations interlock with the demonstration effect backed by promotion. This does not necessarily relate to true characteristics of the good: Guinness is sold as "good for you" or for "power" (admittedly probably truer for it than for most patent medicine!), Coca Cola and its bretheren as somehow modern - chic - associated with status, infant formulas (only too often quite falsely) as the way to give an infant a good start in life. The man who drinks Guinness to be strong and bright to get a better job or who buys Coca Cola to assert his worth or responds to his wife's plea to buy infant formulas for their child is almost always gravely jeopardising his family's nutritional standards and only too often his baby's life.

The general impact of food modernisation on diets of the rural poor of the South and on urban poor outside Latin America and the Caribbean can easily be overstated. However, at least in Asian cities it is growing. Even today for three or four production groups: Coca Cola and its bretheren, infant formulas, tomato paste and tinned fish there is substantial penetration, the results of

which are - on balance - unambiguously bad in the first two cases and open to grave doubt in the latter two.*

Impact on Poor Producers

In general the key actors in modernising food processes buy their raw materials. There are exceptions - eg bananas and tinned fish - but in general processing - packaging - promotion (including distribution) are more profitable than actual growing.+

The main dangers from the small producers point of view are:

- a. he may be squeezed off his land because a middle sized farmer is more able to meet the P-P-P buyer's requirements for scale and certainty of delivery;
- b. or, if he does get a one crop/one buyer contract, he may in fact (by long term contract, by debt, by loss of land quality under intensive mono-cropping) lose his freedom to alter crop patterns and selection of buyers more less permanently, and, in extreme cases, lose the opportunity to grow his own food (if his buyer feels such use of land is inefficient to him - eg. by raising risk of diseased or blemished crops);
- c. by the de facto tying the degree of exploitation of the peasant may be increased and his absolute net income reduced (as seems to have happened in respect to banana farmers in the Philippines);

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+ Even plantation systems are, in many cases (eg. Philippine bananas), being transformed into rural "putting out" systems with technology-debt-input supply tied peasants who are formally, but not practically, independent business proprietors, replacing direct hire labour on large, centrally handled units.

d. and the P-P-P axis may reduce markets for some products - eg. fresh fish, craft produced tomato paste, staple foods "down-graded" by white bread and potato chips. These are often produced by particularly low income fishermen and peasants.

Particular problems arise in respect to crops with sharp seasonal demand or supply patterns. Unless these coincide - small producers will find that they are forced to sell all of their output at a set (low) price during the short (high price on traditional markets) season but may not be guaranteed purchases of all output during the high (low price or none on alternative markets) season when it is supply that varies. When demand is seasonal P-P-P buyers will often enforce the right to alter offtake in ways which require the peasant to maintain (and buy inputs for) excess capacity.

Food Resources and Food System Modernisation

Food system modernisation as such is not necessarily an evil to be resisted. It is its negative impacts on specific groups of poor people in particular places at given times which are at issue.

Legal resources can be of value in supporting education and mobilisation and in devising useable control frameworks. They are necessarily supportive - legal structures (and a fortiori their enforcement) serviceable to poor consumers and producers cannot be created and set in place purely or even primarily by the actions of lawyers.

Education includes making known the bad effects of food modernisation systems, of what legal limitations exist on paper and how they might be used in practice and of what might be done by direct action, political pressure and/or securing new legal frameworks.

LR inputs evidently include describing the existing legal framework, its potential uses and how it might be strengthened. Less evidently they include advice in how to avoid libel and slander - TNC's are often litigious, and people's organisations can ill afford the financial and personnel costs of long drawn, losing, defensive court cases.

Mobilisation flows from education and consciousness raising. LR input is not - as such - likely to involve leadership or even choice of main objectives. It may include advice on how to implement law oriented targets. In addition, many producer and consumer bodies do have uses for "internal constitutional law", ie organisational, administrative, decision-taking and dispute resolution formulas and procedures - areas in which legally trained people can make contributions if they are willing to venture outside formalism and engage in innovative adaptation.

Legal action and lobbying includes taking cases to officials/courts and/or making clear such action will follow unless a resolution of grievances is negotiated sooner. Both are areas in which legally trained persons who are integrally part of acting in support of consumer and producer bodies have something to offer. Lobbying for new regulations/laws is a related activity - again one to which LR is relevant.

It should not be assumed too readily that existing or attainable laws and their enforcement have nothing to offer. Campaigns to limit operations of TNC trawlers in traditional inshore fishing areas, ending abusive "middlemen/toll collector" exactions, creating regulatory frames against infant formula promotion and limiting the use of some foreign trademarks/brandnames (eg, Coke in India) have

proven possible in a fairly wide sway of contexts. This is not - to date - an area in which TNCs or their allies in the South have seen local mobilisation and local action as so dangerous as to be stamped out on sight or concessions on particular cases as so generally damaging as to be fought tooth and nail. Therefore, situations in which LR may be of significant use in ways somewhat similar to more standard client education, advice, negotiating support and legal action are likely to be fairly common.

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International Development Agency Worldviews: Who or What is Central?

The international development agency or development assistance worldviews of rural poverty and the rural poor are not homogenous. However, in both global and national (including Third World) centres there has been an orthodoxy associated most clearly and lucidly with the World Bank and FAO. That orthodoxy has been under growing attack from neo-liberal (ie, Friedmanite-Reaganite) and from radical critics for over a decade but has, to date, sustained its position by incorporating much of the market-oriented/"losers to blame" ideology of the former, while also borrowing many of the slogans of the latter plus - apparently fleetingly* - some of its concerns with the material circumstances of the most deprived.

Issues of Emphasis and Missing Links

The orthodox worldview overemphasises production which it treats as somehow separate from distribution. This results in food demand targets based not on elimination of hunger but on effective (ie backed by money to buy or land to grow food) demand. FAO⁺ has consistently adopted this approach despite verbal bows to its inadequacy.[‡] India and the Philippines illustrate that successful (in terms of more

* To write off the entire McNamara-Chenery-Clark-ul Haq emphasis on absolute poverty, basic material needs, the poorest 40% as sloganeering would be both unfair and simplistic. The material welfare of the very poor did come closer to the centre of Bank concerns (and those of certain major bilateral programmes) and the poor were perceived more as victims and less as delinquents. However, most of the weaknesses of the orthodoxy did remain especially the view of the poor as objects for charity, and of poverty as something to be overcome by managing the poor - a notably "top down", "paternalistic" approach denying the poor any central role in defining and struggling for their own development.

+ eg, Annual Reports, 1974 et seq; World Food Situation in the Year 2000 / NOTE - Check Exact Title/

‡ eg, 1974, Annual Report, passim.

production and improved technology) programmes of this type come up against demand constraints well before supply barriers and do little or nothing to reduce malnutrition and hunger. Production and distribution cannot be separated - they are jointly determined. To accept very unequal access to land and a rural power structure barring the landless/small peasants from effective self-organisation to force up wages (in terms of food purchasable from them) is to accept continued exclusion from the right to eat whatever is achieved on the production side.

It is also overly technocratic - probably a result of its overemphasis on production and its attempt to avoid "sensitive" issues of access to earned income and of power over allocation of resources.* The fact that technical decisions - and especially how their results are delivered to whom - have very real distribution implications is overlooked or suppressed, eg, in initial improved maize seed development the choice of concentration on strains to be used with high levels of water and fertiliser inputs was made on technical grounds without reference to the fact that it excluded the poor peasants whose land was in dry, non-irrigible areas, and who could not afford major input costs. This contribution to increased inequality and absolute impoverishment of some small peasants was not a matter of ill will, or conspiracy, but of a blind faith that technology in practice is value-free.

Too great an emphasis is placed on risk taking within an overall approach which is overly economistic⁺. The poor peasant - and

* Evidently the issues are only avoided on paper and in analysis - the allocation and distribution continue to take place and not on purely technical considerations.

+ Or economystic where Friedmaniatic (or Hayekian) views of the market as the self-justifying test of equity, democracy and efficiency have been incorporated.

logically the poor economy - is a risk avoider because the margins of survival are slim, the major failure leads to loss of land or life and the long run odds on winning case to be relevant. The larger the peasant or landlord and the more dependable his non-agricultural finance (whether cash reserves or a shop or a salaried position held by himself or a household member) the more risks are acceptable. Thus a risk oriented strategy is one for increased polarisation, often with the winners gobbling up the losers' land.

At national or continental level the same applies to food versus exports. To advocate less emphasis on food production in low nutrition, staple food importing countries with a shift to export crops (notably coffee, tea and cocoa) with uncertain prospects (especially if the advice is taken and production growth accelerates!) and a record of highly unstable prices, thus accepting rising food imports* is - if the gamble fails as it very well may - a recipe for rural impoverishment and urban starvation.

The economistic bias is seen in the tendency to assume that sold production is better than household consumed, time saved (eg, by better access to pure water) will logically all go into production, that women's household work is not productive, that popular organisation is not valuable in itself and has a tendency to interfere with production.

These approaches result in inadequately articulated and unbalanced agendas for action seeking to develop homogenous checklists for all

* This is proposed by the World Bank in Accelerated Development In Sub-Saharan Africa: An Agenda for Action, Washington, 1981.

situations with little real analytical linking from grower (usually normative albeit assertedly value-free technical^{*}) action principles to particular case action. The clearest overemphasis is on general prices - presumably partly because it is easiest to say somewhat sensible general things about them.

Beyond that, one has long check lists ranging from research and extension (albeit not suggesting their personnel might start by learning what peasants already know) through delivery of inputs on time (and less frequently who actually gets, and doesn't get them, why) to post-harvest losses. These look quite reasonable - until one looks back and notes that the general checklists and statements of problems of 1980 look remarkably like those of 1960, with little greater articulation or analysis, and still less evidence (except on improved seed and associated increases in inputs) of much progress on grappling with the problems. The constraints posed by inadequate transport and modern sector storage facilities - central in many African contexts - tend to receive trifling attention, presumably because they do not lend themselves to market determined ("solved") generalisations.

Food aid appears either as a deus ex machina to fill gaps or a supporting input to a technically defined solution (eg, food for work to create rural infrastructure to support agricultural modernisation). It is rarely integrated coherently into any particular rural development strategy, and in particular is not linked to altering access to earned income nor to questions of distribution of land, inputs and

* Eg, the private sector is more efficient (for what or whom unspecified) than the public (correct World Bank); mechanisation is the key to increased food production (FAO).

power.*

Managing Poverty and the Poor or Backing Their Struggle Against It?

The international agency world view is highly top down. This is true even when words like participation by the poor (in acting on the agenda set for them not by themselves) are stressed and genuine human or political insurance or market broadening concerns for reducing poverty are explicitly and strongly present.⁺ This is a logical consequence at the intellectual level of production first, technocracy in command, economistic emphasis. Whether it is operational in its own terms - given its rigidity, limited mass appeal and difficulty in relating to specific local conditions - is an open question; in some cases the answer does seem to be yes.

But the top down approach clearly is one in which the poor are objects to be managed, helped, made less poor not subjects to be assisted in regaining understanding of, and command over, their own lives in terms and toward goals chosen by them.

* The result - predictably - is that it affects these in the way that the local power structure favours; usually (not always eg, West Bengal, Kerala, formerly Sri Lanka, perhaps Tanzania) in favour of greater inequality and sometimes of pauperisation of the small peasantry.

+ There is no intent to denigrate mutual (overlapping) interest arguments as such. Historically reform has thrived on a perception that it was necessary to avert explosions. Civil strife is expensive to the poor, reform can gain a dynamic of its own and go beyond marginal meliorism. The poor are bad buyers and payers. If they had access to earned incomes they would be better ones. Even if this is not the central human or moral reason for seeking to overcome poverty it is one which is not per se immoral, and can - in certain circumstances - gain central economic decision taker (state of TNC, capitalist or socialist) support for overcoming poverty. Insisting on final, pure motives and models rather than limited, flawed, but significant, progress laying the basis for more is a worldview more associated with not so poor intelligentsia than with actual poor people, including those organised for action on their own behalf.

Combined with an emphasis on neutral technical decisions taken by well-intentioned technocratic experts, this worldview totally falsifies reality as it is endured and struggled against by the poor.* The state is seen as a benevolent, detached therapeutic agency outside any struggles. Technical decisions are seen as eliminating any class or locality or vested interest conflicts of interest.+ Political economy is quietly divested both of politics and economics with therapy and technology substituted.

As political economic theory this is nonsense in terms of the bourgeois democratic, pluralist and orthodox liberal (or for that matter the neo-liberal marketeering) schools of thought as much as the Marxian. It is deeply dangerous because it does not abolish either political economy or struggle, but merely puts them out of sight where those who understand them can act with less scrutiny. Both politicians and technocrats find the model to have its uses. Overtly it raises the technocrats role and prestige while turning the politicians into benevolent mobilisers for positive, value-free, self-evidently rational courses of action. When something goes wrong everybody can avoid the blame: "implementation" was technically unsound, data were inadequate, the politician didn't understand, the local elite didn't

* See eg, B.B. Schaffer, "To Recapture Public Policy for Politics", Politics, Administration and Change, Vol. VII, No. 1, January-June 1982; F.F.Piven, R.A. Cloward, Regulating the poor: the function of public welfare, Vintage, New York 1972, especially Chapter 9 on "The Great Society and Relief".

+ In the World Bank World Development Reports the attempt produces conundrums. Practices are shown to be oppressive to the poor and dubiously or negatively valid at national economic output level. The question "Why do they continue?" is not put, albeit it is apparently implicitly answered "Because they hadn't read this report". This is - however intended - pure obfuscation, most of the practices and policies cited have quite real payoffs for quite real actors with quite real power, and no analysis failing to identify this concretely can form a basis for achieving change.

co-operate, the poor were conservative and suspicious (as well they may and should be in such contexts!*) All of these claims may be true but their use in this context is to hide the intellectual fatuity of the model, and the actual manipulatory operational systems to which it affords a spurious cover story.

The poor from this point of view are victims - historically one can admit they have been exploited, excluded, oppressed as long as one does not turn that analysis into a process identifying continuity in, and present gainers from, exclusion, exploitation and oppression. But they are also authors and perpetrators of their own poverty, who must either be given safety nets so they (and the system) survive or organised from above to fit in better and become less poor in ways chosen for and enforced on them.

Toward Alternative Worldviews

One alternative is the neo-liberal view which fairly nakedly endorses exploitation and - in principle at least - concludes that unexploitable (ie "surplus") poor should be coerced into silence, kept alive if they might otherwise explode, or may be needed as exploitable labour presently, or can be tucked into corners of no interest to, and little burden on, the system, otherwise eliminated by whatever method is socially and politically least divisive.* The power of neo-liberalism as an intellectual credo - in somewhat diluted form, is a surprisingly widely held one, eg, Henry Kissinger, Mayor Koch, Prime Minister Thatcher - and as an operational force nationally and

* Eg, in Bangladesh very poor sub-classes have late marriages, high family break-up rates, few surviving children because the economic context is such as to make family life and children unsustainable luxuries. The same was true in respect to some sub-classes in 19th century Ireland (who had, however, the option of emigration as a more humane way of removing themselves from being a burden on the system). Literal starvation or mass killing are not the only ways to "phase out" "superfluous" socio-economic groups.

and internationally should not be underemphasised.

However, its electoral appeal in functioning capitalist democracies is likely to prove short-lived - there are too many losers who cannot for very long be convinced that their losses are an investment in their own futures. And in the Third World it has tended to be a veneer over much cruder but more locally rooted operational systems of exploitation, domination and oppression. For example in Latin America only in Pinochet's Chile can one seriously argue that neo-liberalism may be a co-dominant operational theology - the other national security states and more antiquated juntas have older historic and contextual roots.*

In any case, neo-liberalism while certainly another development can hardly be seen in terms of development of peoples power or alternatives focused on human need centred development.+ Therefore it will not be considered further here.

* If one accepts the Berlinguer (Italian Communist Party) critique of Soviet model socialism - as exemplified in Poland - one might argue that neo-liberalism is likely to find its heartland in industrial socialist politics. However, the differences - turning on the perceptions that the poor are critical as a source of labour power and surplus value and that workers are in short supply/excess supply - mean both less inhumanity at the material level and quite different mechanisms of coercion and management. Admittedly, General Jaruselski's economic policy to date is at certain levels pure state neo-liberalism but it is based on getting more workers to work harder not "scrapping" a substantial portion of the population.

+ The fact that it is an extant alternative should, however, give pause to some criticisms in some contexts of institutions and individuals backing the orthodox international development assistance model or - more especially - its McNamara variant. Despite its limitations, there is at times a very real kernel of truth in the classic British nursery warning "Keep tight hold of nurse, For fear of something worse".

From the present point of view the interesting fragments are those which can be termed development alternatives. No complete catalogue either of contributors or of elements is feasible in a brief presentation, but several clusters and themes can be identified.

One cluster can be termed unofficial. Among the better known early examples is What Now - Another Development^{*}, an approach followed by the Dag Hammarskjold Foundation both with subsequent special volumes and in its journal Development Dialogue. Another series is that of the international foundation for development alternatives based at Nyon, Switzerland but conspicuously trying to reach, and to publish work by, a fairly extensive global network (admittedly not one with many poor members). "The Scheveningen Report"⁺ is an example of an "unofficial" conceptualisation from a mixed, global group of "personalities" acting in their personal capacities. Another cluster of unofficial alternative approaches to development has come from religious organisations. Two examples are the monographs of the Advisory Group on Economic Matters of the World Council of Churches⁺ and the series on Zimbabwe (before independence), Namibia and South Africa liberation and development alternatives published by the (British) Catholic Institute for International Affairs (in some cases jointly with the British Council of Churches).

* Dag Hammarskjold Foundation, Uppsala, 1975.

+ "Towards a New International Development Strategy", Development Dialogue, 1980 No. 1.

+/ WCC/Commission on Churches' Participation in Development, Ecumenism and a New World Order, Geneva, 1980; Transnational Corporations, Technology and Human Development, Geneva, 1981; Hunger of Justice and Bread for the Hungry, Geneva, 1982.

In a somewhat different position are "unofficial official" approaches. The most important of these is that of the Brandt Commission.* This is a major attempt at reconceptualisation even if its main thrust was programmatic and its presentation necessarily (given the demi-official charter and action orientation of the Commission) a bargained compromise between global Keynesianism and participatory development propositions. In respect to rural impoverishment and food, it took a far more radical line than the international orthodoxy both as to the centrality of overcoming hunger, and on the need to make structural as well as resource transfer changes, so that hungry, absolutely poor people (who are largely rural) could feed themselves out of their own greater production or earned incomes.

Finally, official international agency concepts and programmes have not remained unchanged. The best known single example of formulation is probably the International Labour Organisations' Employment, Growth and Basic Needs: A One World Problem.⁺ It both flowed from employment mission work by ILO and - following the endorsement of this approach by ILO members - did lead to significant programme changes.

It is interesting to read ILO Basic Needs mission country reports in counterpoint to IMF or World Bank ones - the divergences are substantial (intriguingly even when there is an overlap in personnel). Perhaps the greatest institutional programmatic shift has been that of WHO whose reprioritisation toward basic health with the poor, paramedical provision of services, health education and preventative medicine is both far-reaching and very much a break with traditional

* North-South: A Programme for Survival, MIT/Pan, 1980. See also R.H. Green "Brandt on an End to Poverty and Hunger" and A.H. Jamal "Man at the Centre of Economic Purpose" in Third World Quarterly, Vol. 3, No. 1, January 1981.

+ Geneva, 1975.

medical orthodoxy. Two primarily conceptual/modelling oriented UN agencies have also been active in producing parts of alternatives to internationally orthodox worldviews. There are UNRIST (UN Research Institute for Social Development)* and the United Nations University.+ In the food field, the World Food Council has been notably more hunger, poverty and socio-economic change focused than FAO and, at least implicitly, a severe critic of the former's technocratic, productionist worldview.

Processes, Structures, Contexts

The development alternative approaches lay much more stress on processes, structures and contexts than does the orthodoxy. This may make them less general, but it certainly accords better with the realities of continuity linked to change, power operated via complex structures (or combatted by organising counter structures) and quite specific needs, constraints, aspirations and possibilities relating to different historical, material, institutional and cultural contexts.

For example, hunger is not simply a fact - it is a reality which is caused and maintained by specific processes operating with particular internal logics and identifiable beneficiaries. These processes usually do not aim at producing hunger, and may yield substantial benefits to an array of sub-classes including some who are poor. A recent study - which made no pretence at taxonomic completeness - identified seventeen at national level.†

* See eg, J.Schatan, "A Project Illustration: Concepts and Methods in 'Food Systems and Society'", Oslo Workshop on "Food as a Human Right", September 1981.

+ See eg, U. Jonsson, "The Causes of Hunger", Food and Nutrition Bulletin, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1980.

† WCC/CCPD, Hunger of Justice and Bread for the Hungry, op. cit.

Structures influence outcomes. This is particularly true of technological inputs. Who decides what seeds are used for (eg, drought resistance, higher yields with minimum inputs, disease resistance, nutritional content as well as or instead of maximum yield given a heavy water/chemical package) heavily conditions who can benefit. Delivery systems for seeds and associated inputs determine to a large extent who has physical access. Pricing procedures (eg, private market, free distribution, subsidy, low selling price clawed back in subsequent purchase prices for crops) condition who can afford to buy and related "rationing" (eg. price, membership in bodies given delivery priorities) whose access is effective.

Similarly, in respect to technology more generally - both historically and now - both specific institutional and broader socio-economic structures dominate who controls, decides on the uses of and benefits at least as much as the technology per se. Indeed, these structures heavily condition what knowledge is developed into applied technology and for what uses it is adapted and applied.*

Contexts are equally critical. For example, to argue that "Cows eat people" presupposes a context in which cows eat grain or crops either eaten by people or grown in substitution for human food crops. In Europe and Japan this presupposition is largely valid, in North America it is true for perhaps half of beef production. In Asia, Africa, Latin America and Australasia it is the exception rather than the rule. Thus in Botswana grass-fed cows provide the bulk of rural income and allow significant food purchases in a country which has yet to develop systematic crop production at levels equivalent to self-sufficiency except in years of abnormally favourable rainfall.

* See eg, WCC/CCPD, Transnational Corporations, Technology and Human Development, op. cit.

A case for more emphasis on crop development exists (especially as the poorest rural households are substantially outside the cattle economy) but not because cows eat grain needed by people. Similarly to build up animal drawn implement mechanised agriculture in an area with no previous experience in use of animals for draught power poses complex problems well beyond providing donkeys or oxen and implements. The training and care of the animals, fitting their fodder into production patterns, training peasants in how to use them, identifying and meeting veterinary problems - all are more complex than might be supposed. In the absence of previous experience with animals, are all areas in which even organised peasant groups require training, advice, demonstration to make a start.

To argue that poor people can identify their own needs and rights and how to organise to achieve them, is not to assert that they are technically omniscient, or have a broad knowledge of what has proven possible elsewhere and how they could adapt it. Doubtless pure trial and error might provide answers, but at a cost in time and other resources which can be justified only by a very dogmatic version of self-reliance and autonomy verging on anarchy and refusal to benefit from the common experience of humanity.

Limitations

These fragments toward approaches suffer from four limitations. First, they tend - especially to the extent they incorporate elements of non-violent struggle and at least tactical cooperation of the poor with some fractions of the elite - to be subject to co-optation. The history of basic human needs as a development focus from its starting point in What Now to its maximum official formulation in the ILO's Employment Growth and Basic Needs: A One World Problem and down to a quarrying ground for bits and pieces of basic material need programmes which abstracted both from meaningful participation and

from struggle is a case in point.

Second, some variants, notably those of basically authoritarian Western authors like J. Galtung and D. Senghaas and of technocratic expert manned bodies like UNRIST and UNU, mount quite astoundingly complex conceptualisation, examination, analysis models. Apart from appearing to run the danger of technicism run mad, these are a form of "black boxing" (Western Witchcraft?) which prevents them from being understood and controlled by the poor, and makes them likely to end as part of the problem, not of the answer.

Third, there is a tendency to slide into conspiracy theories and/or counter simplification. Technology is not itself a conspiracy nor is its use necessarily so. TNCs pursue growth, accumulation, profit, survival, power and production within a logic which is more amoral (and thus subject to being used for immoral ends) and unaccountable (and therefore likely to exclude most human beings from consideration) than it is purposefully evil. The justified moral outrage of some writers* at the amorality leading to immoral results under the cover of technically determined, value-free public image models is in danger of slipping into seeing reality as a conspiracy rather than as a process of struggle. This is dangerous because it clouds analysis and especially analysis of how holders of power (eg. TNCs) might actually be constrained to act differently. Similarly, to reject the somewhat unfocused use of food aid as a means of subsidising Northern farmers in a way which can asserted to help the poor and/or the development of the Third World does not lead logically to denunciation of balance of payments support transfers to food deficit countries made in food, nor to the concept of linking food allocations

* Eg, S. George, How the Other Half Dies, Pelican, London, 1976.

(globally or nationally) to rural development strategies. To end all food transfers now without doing anything else on the production or distribution side would be a recipe for starvation - to the extent that certain writers* advocate that they are even less clear-sighted or humanly responsible than the international orthodoxy.

Fourth, the fragments are just that. When embodied in particular alternative developments they - in an inversion of the orthodoxy - are too particular and context bound to make identification of their general principles fully possible. At the more global level they tend either to be logical sets of conceptual boxes, which unfortunately lack concrete objective correlatives to fit into many of the boxes, or to be a set of guidelines and norms which are neither rigorously enough argued, nor articulated coherently enough to grass roots applications to constitute a genuine paradigm.+

Legal Resources: Potential Parts of Solutions

Legally educated personnel are not normally normal members of peoples movements, not of the organised (or unorganised) poor. Therefore - even when genuinely in solidarity with them - they cannot provide leadership, blueprints, institutional structures, alternative technically determined answers on what and how, without falling back into the orthodox international development assistance model criticised above.

* Eg, T. Jackson writing for Oxfam and C. Fryer writing for a World Council of Churches project. (Neither Oxfam nor WCC in practice accepts this simplified approach and possibly neither would the authors if they actually felt their writings could lead to a sudden cutoff of food transfers).

+ Both the human rights versions of basic human needs and the World Council of Churches "Just, Participatory and Sustainable Society" formulation are very much open to these criticisms.

However, this should not be read either as arguing that there is no role for legal resources in development alternatives, nor that legally trained personnel should be totally passive responders to specific requests from the organised poor. That approach is too narrow for at least three reasons: First, the organised poor do need to deal with loci of power and with elites, usually by means other than naked confrontation. Therefore they do need persons who can interpret power centres and their logic to them (the organised poor) and their rights, needs, programmes and claims to power centres.

Second, to argue that self-liberation and consciousness raising are key, and outside leadership often an obstacle, is quite consistent with believing that genuinely supportive "outsiders" with knowledge and expertise can act both as input providers and catalysts, especially if they have the humility not to try to dominate or to turn initial "stimulatory leadership" roles into permanent institutional ones.

Third, peoples organisations have quite specific needs for legal inputs: to defend their members and structures, to identify ways of using existing legal systems, to formulate proposals for attainable and functional legal system changes (either to protect gains initially won by non-legal means, or to highlight contradictions between "agreed" norms and actual practice), to develop their own institutions' "constitutional and administrative law" and "dispute settlement" structures, to negotiate with outside power foci, to train their own members in paralegal and specific legal skills.

This suggests a complex role for legally trained personnel - one with several aspects not all of which are likely to be carried on regularly by any one individual. One cluster consists of fairly standard legal

services - defending clients, formulating cases for them, advising on avoiding litigation, and negotiating settlements. A second is "promotional" - showing how such organisations have worked, when and why with a view to furthering their success. A third is analytical, conceptual but with the aim of providing inputs in a form which groups of the organised rural poor can understand, master and use for themselves. A fourth is ad hoc legal and paralegal education. A final cluster is that of catalytic and supportive technical leadership. Knowledge can be power and winning self-knowledge is a process which can benefit - especially at its early stages - from outside questions and comments, so long as these do not become rhetorical as to questioning and a procrustean agenda as to suggestions.

International Development Assistance: Authoritarian Non-Accountability

The administrative and decision-taking approach of international development assistance - whether intentionally or otherwise - is dominated by a vision of Platonic guardianship, top down authoritarianism, bureaucratic manipulation and upward only accountability. In a sense these represent a continuity with colonialism albeit the tendency to "de-politicise" public policy by masking ideology in supposedly value-free expertise is much more prominent than in colonial pronouncements or practice. Also new (or neo-colonial) is a repetitive tendency to create parallel institutional structures responsible to the external aid agency bypassing both local peoples and national (whether elite or popular channels and structures).

The central issue is not whether international resource transferring bodies mean well. Nor is it whether their advice is sound. Even if both questions can be answered yes (often, though by no means always, the case), the attempted depoliticisation of public policy, granting unchecked power to experts and elites co-operating with them and deliberate confusion of technical facts with necessarily value judgements* is deeply inimical to peoples organisations, popular participation and development.

External Organisations and Experts Know Best

International resource transfer agencies rarely admit past mistakes and almost always assert clarity, applicability and correctness for their present view with very little sense of humility,

* For a similar critique of the expertise - rational choice - modernisation approach to public policy more generally see B.B. Schaffer, "To Recapture Public Policy For Politics", Politics, Administration and Change, VII - 1, January-June, 1982.

uncertainty or the variety of experiences and contexts which make universal export policy models highly unsuitable for general, unadapted use.

These characteristics are not altered by experience, past advice followed by the recipient to his disadvantage (or benefit as the case may be) is cited as his mistake if the agency or expert has now changed its interpretation.

Particular examples and broad principles are cited - what is usually absent is any articulation between them. The examples can be fitted into alternative interpretations and proposals (each of which may be appropriate at some time and place); the broad principals flow from value judgements (eg, the market knows best, public decision and knowledge - except apparently those of international aid experts! - are always faulty) and/or Western intellectual styles (eg, the bowdlerised "Basic Material Needs" approach of the late 1970's which sounded like a translated plan for the care and rearing of dairy cattle rather than an approach to meeting basic human needs)

It is invidious to cite examples - few international development agencies (bilateral or multilateral can escape these criticisms). But no better illustration can be found than the present World Bank approach to sub-Saharan Africa especially as exemplified in the "Berg Report"* of 1981. This is especially true of its views that more coffee, tea, cocoa and less food should be grown and that

* Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Agenda for Action, World Bank, Washington 1981.

parallel institutions responsible to the World Bank bypassing basic national structures are wrong. Each of these is a totally unacknowledged reversal of policy* as is the downgrading of health, education and low income group welfare in the overall strategic proposals (though not in the chapters actually dealing with the health and education sectors).

There are exceptions to this pattern. The WHO and UNICEF and - in part** - the ILO are examples among multilateral official agencies and the Nordic among bilateral aid agencies. But these remain embattled exceptions under pressure to conform - as do individual experts who disagree with the cult of the foreign expert which they find morally obnoxious and operationally counter-productive to the supposed beneficiaries***.

Platonic Guardianship and Bureaucratic Process

Externally based expertise normally operates via dependent local bureaucracies, client local elites, and manipulated workers and peasants. Its appeals are to commandism, hierarchy and "value-free"

* The first is almost certainly technically and distributionally hopelessly unsound; the second is probably politically and functionally sound in most contexts if one favours local and peoples control over their own affairs and welfare. However, the validity of present stands is not the point at issue here.

** There is great unevenness by section and programme. The core ILO activities from before it broadened its approach to workers and to development are much more in the standard platonic guardianship pattern.

*** As with poverty so with development - it is much more profitable to be an expert analyst and prescribe about it however often the prescriptions go disastrously wrong and however shoddy the analysis, than to be a poor person who actually works successfully at overcoming personal, family, and community poverty by achieving development.

technocracy free from political accountability. Its relationships are with the local "big battalions" which are easiest for external "big battalions" to relate to and with local (almost always elite members) individuals who share or appear to share its technical and cultural worldview.

Because technocrats know best, there is no need to learn from local experience (except perhaps that of other experts) and especially not from workers and peasants. As a result a command structure to enforce acceptance of expert prescriptions and expert identified resource deliveries appears to be efficient. It is backed by education - of workers and villages to obey and of low level cadres to "manage" workers and villages on the basis of these prescriptions handed down by experts.

The ILOs "module" training programme (at least if viewed - as the ILO asserts it should be - as more than a simplified on the job approach to upgrading to semi-skilled and semi-artisan positions) is an urban and agrobusiness example. The World Bank's conversion of the Tanzanian village manager proposals from village selected, village member cadres to learn technical skills to use at the direction of Village Councils to secondary school leavers to be trained to manage (ie. direct) villagers and Village Councils is an even more telling example.*

* Luckily few villages in Tanzania have been inert or inept enough to accept this imposition. As a result most managers manage only their own paperwork. Some have accepted roles of serving villages within terms of reference set by them and a not insignificant number have been rejected by villages and forced out by their pressure.

Needless to say this approach is not in principle unacceptable to local experts and officials who fit fairly well into its lower and middle cadres. If they accept it fully, however, they become more and more dependent on the external agencies, local control group - eg. the World Bank/FAO sponsored and dominated Marketing Development Bureau in Tanzania systematically arrogates all key technical and policy advising functions to itself and takes care to prevent the emergence of domestic competitors.

A similar tendency arises in choice of cooperating institutions. The international resource transfer agencies are bureaucratic big battalions. They relate easily to their counterparts abroad and very uneasily to overtly political (especially populist or radical) bodies and to numerous, administratively ill defined, small peoples organisations. This can lead to remarkable defensiveness by such agencies toward self evidently over-centralised, badly functioning big bureaucratic bodies (especially if they and their agency brethren helped design them) when they are under domestic attack for exploitation, loss of funds or sheer physical incompetence - eg. the MDBs protection of Tanzania's National Milling Corporation floated in 1974 largely on USAID experts' advice.

The symbiotic relationships between international and local experts and external and domestic big battalions uniformly reinforce hierarchicalism and commandism. They cannot be said to have any similarly uniform positive impact on quantity, quality or cost of production. Their impact on genuine local initiative, self-reliance and accountability is normally highly negative.

Who Responds? How?

Technocratic, top down approaches do cause responses - at least if they are backed by carrots (resources to be awarded to clients) and sticks (means to coerce, isolate and exclude from benefits those who do not "cooperate" or "participate")*. The critical questions are who responds and how. Any quick answers are oversimplified - patterns vary widely in detail.

"Progressive farmers" respond and collect the carrots. Progressive in this context usually means: above average in income and access to resources, with good official and elite contacts, somewhat more educated and (at least apparently) culturally similar to the experts and officials than most peasants. Linked to them are officials with similar characteristics. The problem is not that these individuals are evil, but that they are atypical - asomi in the semi-admiring, semi-perjorative East African term for the semi-modernised, semi-Westernised African who is largely detached from his own community, and upwardly mobile either independent from it or at its expense.

The international agency approach is inequality producing and divisive because of the sub-class specificity of respondents and beneficiaries. It is even more deeply divisive because it pulls asomi away from their communities and bases, thereby robbing peoples organisations of many who might in different contexts be among those communities' and organisations' own leaders and experts.

* One of the most unfortunate aspects of this approach is its tendency to cloak itself in the verbiage of co-operation and participation while using an ideological and operational approach quite antithetical to them. Oddly, many practitioners can see this failing in other experts and institutions, but quite genuinely fail to perceive it in themselves. In extreme cases such experts speak of "saving" peasants not merely from their states and large (public or private) corporations, but also from village councils and economic organisations created, operated and controlled by them.

For others the response is "positive" because of the stick, i.e. manipulation assures their participation not because they are better off but because refusal to cooperate bears a higher price. Many rural development schemes - eg. those of the Fleuve province of Senegal and of the "pseudo co-operative" palm oil plantations of Sumatra - are glaring examples.

Finally, many respond by "retreat" - escape from the formal economy into subsistence agriculture and small scale urban crafts and services. This option may prevent damage to peasant and worker well being - the isolated Casamance Province of Senegal seems to be an example - but it does prevent, by self isolation, the acquisition of external contacts and inputs usually needed to start even a locally based, self reliant process of development.

One Way Accountability

International development agencies do not lack a concept of accountability. The problem is that it is from the bottom up to themselves and renders them effectively totally non-accountable to the supposed intended beneficiaries.

In the standard rural development model peasants are to be accountable to technical agricultural officers and to village and co-op managers who in turn are accountable to higher levels of technocrats who are ultimately responsible to the aid agency and - if this cannot be avoided - to national political decision takers. If possible the national accountability should be

minimised by parallel structures and enclave programmes.*

This is from the political point of view not accountability but its denial. By the nature of its bypassing of local and national accountability, it appears likely to prevent any development of domestic political accountability, to lead to growing agency-host tensions (especially if political accountability and most especially responsibility to workers and peasants is to some extent a reality) to hamper people's organisational efforts to mobilise and to hold those who affect their members lives (for whatever reason, by whatever means) accountable.

Legal Resources, Mobilisation and Accountability

Legal resources can be relevant to building structures of popular participation and accountability to constrain and - perhaps - convert the international aid agency administrative/technical impact. The starting premises in support of which they should be utilised are three;

- a. no viable development can be achieved through bypassing local institutions and accountability as opposed to strengthening them;

* In fairness, the problems of operating in a context of elite corruption or oppression which often confront these agencies do create real pressures to adopt this course. If it were linked to accepting effective accountability to actual workers and peasants a moral case might be made for it. However, even then one may query the plausibility of the World Bank mobilising peasants to assert their rights against the host state and the practical potential and limits of the locally self determined, Swedish protected rural enclaves SIDA's rural development effort created in late Imperial Ethiopia.

- b. public policy must be recaptured for politics and accountability, not left to the hidden value judgments of non-accountable technocrats and elites using them to avoid responsibility;
- c. popular organisations - eg. of workers, peasants, women, consumers, ethnic and caste minorities - can be effective as political pressure groups and so direct self reliant development foci; thus their mobilisation and strengthening is critical to realising the right to development.

Legally trained personnel can be of value in providing information on existing legal structures and opportunities, on advising in respect to negotiations, in pointing out both formal legal and direct political pressure means to begin enforcing accountability on local landlords and trades, local level state officers, higher state bureaucracies and institutions, political decision taken at local and national levels and ultimately-through national institutions - on international development agencies.

In addition, because legally trained personnel do speak the language of international experts, they may be able to act in solidarity with people's organisations by interpreting them to international experts. WHO's conversion to rural, people based health programmes and the ILO's adoption of Convention 141 covering the rights to organise and to act on a self help basis of rural workers including small peasants demonstrate that international organisations can respond

to popular aspirations and pressures and act to affirm their rights. In both cases experts (as it happens not legally trained experts) who stood in solidarity and close contact with the people directly affected were critical in achieving these altered development worldviews and operational priorities.