

RURAL POVERTY UNPERCEIVED: PROBLEMS AND REMEDIES

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## RURAL POVERTY UNPERCEIVED: PROBLEMS AND REMEDIES<sup>1</sup>

The thesis of this paper is that there are major obstacles to perceiving the nature and extent of rural poverty in third world countries. These obstacles are found both in the nature of rural poverty and in the condition of those, not themselves poor rural people, who do or do not perceive it. The argument has implications for all rural development programmes and projects and for the training of staff. The conclusion is that reversals are required if the nature and extent of poverty are to be appreciated, and if action is to fit well with the needs of those who are poor.

### The Context of Cognitive Problems

The argument is set in a context of cores and peripheries of knowledge. Globally, there is a gradient from extremes of wealth to extremes of poverty. In this system there are rich, urban, industrialised, high status cores and poor, rural, agricultural and low status peripheries. In the cores there is a mutual attraction and reinforcement of power, prestige, resources, professionals, professional training, and the capacity to generate knowledge. Both internationally, and within third world countries, centripetal forces draw resources and educated people in towards the cores and away from the peripheries. At the international level, brain drains are well known. But within third world countries too there are similar movements. An urban trap sucks in professionals and holds them fast with better houses, services, schools and career prospects. Domestic cycles and career patterns reinforce the flow: young, unmarried officials are sent to remote poor rural areas, but age, marriage, children, seniority and responsibility draw them in towards larger and larger urban and administrative centres; and academic researchers do their fieldwork in rural areas when they are young and inexperienced, but once older and more experienced, they too are trapped in towns by family, teaching and promotion. As people grow older and more influential, so they move further from rural life and become busier; and whether in international agencies, national ministries or departments,

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<sup>1</sup> For comments on earlier versions of this paper I am grateful to Mick Moore, Hans Singer and World Bank staff who took part in a seminar to discuss a draft. Responsibility for what is written is mine alone.

or at subnational level, the more they become involved in rural development at the policy level, the more likely it is that their only firsthand experience of rural conditions will be through brief rural visits. Further, the more influential, more important and busier they become, the more such visits are likely to be formally structured and selective. The more powerful they are, the less contact they have with rural poverty.

Beyond questions of contact, there are other cognitive problems. University education and professional training impart biases which are variously urban, industrial, high technology, capital-intensive, appropriate for temperate climates, and market rather than subsistence-orientated. Textbooks, curricula, examinations, professional journals, academic awards, national and international distinctions, professional values and ideas of sophistication, the media, the priority of armaments and security, the desire of elites for international mobility - these are among the interlocking influences which point and form ambitions, which mould ways of seeing things, and which sway choices of where in the world to work. The cognitive apparatus formed by education and training is often specialised. Its blinkers allow only a narrow view. Most professionals do not anyway face towards, let alone live in, rural areas. Those that do have often been disabled by their conditioning so that they are directed towards those with whom they have most in common - the less poor rural people; so that they link in with whatever in rural areas they can find which is familiar (whatever is modern, marketed, urban in origin, sophisticated); and so that they see and prescribe for only that specialised part for which they have been trained, and not for the whole. At its ugliest, professional training inculcates an arrogance in which superior knowledge and superior status are assumed. Professionals then see rural people as ignorant, backward and primitive, and themselves to blame for their poverty. Social Darwinianism lives again in the ideologies of prosperous and therefore virtuous urban elites looking out on the rural mass whose poverty reflects their lack of virtue. The very phrase - "the rural mass" - fosters stereotypes, convenient glosses for ignorance of the reality. Not only do urban-based professionals and officials often not know; worse, they do not know that they do not know.

These round assertions have to be qualified. Many initiatives are

sensitive to rural poverty: programmes for primary health care, adult education, appropriate technology, off-season employment, research on poor people's subsistence crops, and so on. But focussing on these can distort judgement. Myths of enlightenment can be created and sustained by the enlightened meeting the enlightened, though darkness is all around. A few outstanding individuals, projects and institutions draw attention away from the many others that are not outstanding. They may also obscure the fact that on the gradients between cores and peripheries there are many points where power, professional authority, and ignorance of rural poverty are to be found together.

#### Integrated Rural Poverty

The cognitive problems of observers are only part of the difficulties. The other part is in the nature of rural poverty. Insofar as attempts are made to push out from the cores and to learn about rural poverty, it is the poorer people who are most remote and most difficult to reach.

One way of analysing rural poverty or deprivation is in terms of five interlocking dimensions: poverty proper (lack of assets and lack of flows of food and cash); physical weakness (reflected in lower body weights and greater seasonal variation in body weights); vulnerability to contingencies (to irreversible ratchets of impoverishment - the mortgage or sale of assets or the incurring of debts because of sickness, famine, disaster, dowry, bridewealth or other costs); powerless (both political and in terms of control of events and relationships); and isolation. All contribute to the integrated nature of rural poverty; and the list does not include many other influences - international, intranational, within rural society - which perpetuate and deepen poverty. But for our purposes, isolation deserves special attention since this is the dimension which most impedes the understanding of outsiders, and which from its very nature may be the least easy to recognise.

The isolation of poor families and households can be described in terms which are spatial, social, and related to knowledge and access. Spatially, poor families tend to be removed from the centre of things: either they are in areas remote from urban centres, or they are on the edges of villages or away from main roads.<sup>1</sup> Socially they may have fewer

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<sup>1</sup> See pages 7 - 9 below.

relationships on which they can rely: poorer households tend to be smaller, and many of the poorest have female heads. They are illiterate, have not radio, and know little about events beyond their neighbourhood. Their members rarely go to public meetings, receive no advice from extension workers in agriculture, health, family planning or nutrition, and travel little except in search of work. They make less use of services (health, transport, education) than their less poor neighbours. They are either fragmented and scattered with members migrating for work, or trapped in one place by debts and obligations. Many adopt a strategy of a low profile: accepting powerlessness as a condition for protection, showing that they will not pose any threat to their patrons. Some, whose legal position is weak, such as self-settling refugees (Chambers 1979) and squatters (Mbithi and Barnes 1975), may even try to hide, to be invisible to the official eye. Out of sight, they hope to be out of mind.

#### Rural Development Tourism

There are many ways in which urban-based outsiders may learn about rural poverty and poor rural people. Questionnaire surveys, village studies, reports by social anthropologists, findings of medical and nutritional research, censuses, statistics for the use of services, routine or special reports within government systems or by non-government organisations, project evaluations - these are some sources. But a major, and perhaps the most important influence on the perceptions of urban-based outsiders is rural development tourism - rural tourism for short - the phenomenon of the brief rural visit. It influences and is a part of all or almost all other sources of information as listed above. It is widespread. There are thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, of cases daily.<sup>1</sup> In spite of this it has not to my knowledge been seriously analysed.<sup>2</sup> This is

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<sup>1</sup> This may seem high. But if district headquarters alone are considered, let alone capital cities, provincial or regional headquarters, sub-district headquarters, and other towns, and without including China, 80 countries with an average of 30 districts require only a little over 4 cases a day to make 10,000.

<sup>2</sup> But a one-day Workshop on Rural Development Tourism was held at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, on 10 March 1977. In writing this paper, I acknowledge a debt to the discussions of that workshop.

astonishing until one reflects on reasons. For academic analysis, it is too dispersed and ephemeral for easy rigour, not neatly in any disciplinary domain, and barely conceivable as a topic for a thesis. For practical professionals engaged in rural development it is perhaps too close to the nose to be in focus. It is, moreover, a subject for anecdote and shame: stories for bar gossip rather than comparative study, and memories of personal follies one prefers not to expose to public ridicule. Nor is self-critical introspection one of the more prominent tendencies of rural developers. Yet it is through this rural tourism, if at all, that 'core' (urban-based, professional, powerful) people see and meet those who are 'peripheral' (rural, uneducated, weak). Their brief rural visits can scarcely fail to play a key part in forming their impressions and beliefs and influencing their actions and decisions.

The visit of a rural tourist may be for one day or for several. The "tourists" or visitors may come from a foreign country, a capital city, a seat of regional or provincial government, a district headquarters, or some smaller urban place. Most commonly they are government officials - administrators, health staff, agriculturalists, educators, community developers, engineers, foresters, or inspectors of this and that; but they may also be private technical specialists, academic researchers, the staff of voluntary agencies, journalists, diplomats, politicians, consultants, or the staff of aid agencies. Differing in race, nationality, religion, profession, age, sex, language, interests, prejudices, conditioning and experience, they usually have three things in common: they come from urban areas; they want to find something out; and they are short of time.

Rural tourism has many purposes and many styles. Technical specialists concerned with physical resources may in practice have little contact with rural people, and there may be little formality about their visits. Others - those concerned with administration and human resource development in its various forms - may in contrast be involved in many meetings with people. It is with these sorts of visits that we are primarily concerned.

Caricature is tempting, and exaggeration is built into any process of induction from anecdotes which are repeated and remembered because they are good stories. There are also differences between cultures, environments

and individual tourists. The following sketch illustrates the pathology of such visits especially when carried out by people who are treated as important. It is not intended as a balanced portrayal.

The visitor sets out late, delayed by last minute business, by people anxious for decisions before his or her departure, by a family crisis, by a cable or telephone call, by others taking part in the same visit, by mechanical or administrative problems with vehicles, or by any one of a hundred forms of human error. Even if the way is not lost, there is enough fuel, and there are no breakdowns, the programme still runs behind schedule. The visitor is encapsulated, first in a Landrover, Jeep or other vehicle, and later in a moving entourage of officials and local notables (headmen, chairmen of village committees, village accountants, progressive farmers, traders). Whatever their private feelings, (indifferent, suspicious, amused, anxious, irritated, or enthusiastic), the rural people put on their best face and receive the visitor hospitably. According to ecology, economy and culture, the visitor is given goats, garlands, coconut milk, coca-cola, coffee, tea or milk. Speeches are made. Schoolchildren sing or clap. Buildings, machines, construction works, new crops, exotic animals, the clinic, the school, the new road - are inspected. A self-conscious group (the self-help committee, the women's handicraft group) dressed in their best clothes are seen and spoken to and nervously respond in ways which they hope will bring benefits and avoid penalties. There are tensions between the visitor's questions and curiosity, officials' desire to select what is seen, and the mixed motives of different rural people who have to live with the officials and with each other after the visitor has left. Time and an overloaded programme are anyway on their side. As the day wears on and heats up, the visitor becomes less inquisitive, and, ask fewer questions, and is finally glad, exhausted and bemused, to retire to the circuit bungalow, the rest house, the guest house, the host official's residence, or an urban home or hotel. The village returns to normal, no longer wearing its special face. When dark falls and people talk more freely, the visitor is not there.

Shortage of time, the importance of the visitor, and the desire for information separately or together influence what is perceived. Lack of time drives out the open-ended question; the visitor imposes meanings through the questions asked. Checking is impossible, and prudent and



hopeful lies become facts. People are neglected as opposed to formal actions and physical objects. Refugees in a rural camp in Tanzania said of UN and government officials that "They come, and they sign the book, and they go", and "They only talk with the buildings". A villager in Senegal said to Adrian Adams concerning visitors "Ils ne savent pas qu'il y a ici des gents vivants" (Adams 1978). Above all, on such visits, the poorer people tend not to be seen or met.

#### Rural Poverty Unobserved

There are many biases against contact with and perceptions of poverty. They apply not only to rural tourism, but also variously to rural research and to the behaviour and perceptions of low-level staff living and working in rural areas.

##### i) spatial biases: urban, tarmac and roadside

Most learning about rural conditions is mediated by vehicles. This applies not only to rural tourism, but also to research. Starting and ending in urban centres, visits follow networks of roads. With rural tourism, the hazards of dirt roads, the comfort of the tourist, the location of places for spending the night, the location of places to visit, the shortages alike to time and fuel dictate a preference for tarmac roads and for travel close to urban centres. The result is overlapping urban and roadside biases.

Urban bias concentrates rural visits near urban centres and especially near capital cities and large administrative centres. But the regional distribution of the poorest rural people often shows concentration in remoter areas - Northeastern Brazil, lower Ukambani in Kenya, the Tribal Districts of Central India. In many parts of the third world, some of the poorest people are being extruded from densely populated areas better served with communications and are being forced, in order to survive, to colonise less accessible areas, especially savannahs and forests. Inaccessible from urban centres, they remain largely unseen.

Tarmac and roadside bias also direct attention towards those who are less poor and away from those who are poorer. Visible development

follows main roads. Factories, offices, shops and official markets all tend to be at the sides of main roads. Even agricultural development has a roadside bias: in Tamil Nadu agricultural demonstrations of new seeds and fertilisers have been sited beside main roads; and on irrigation systems, roads often follow canals so that the farms seen are those of topenders who receive more water and not those of tailenders who receive less or none. Services along roadsides are also better. Edward Heneveld (personal communication) found that two schools beside the main highway from West to North Sumatra had more than their quota of teachers, while a school one kilometre off the road had less than its quota. For part of Western Kenya, Joseph Ssenyonga has described an "elite roadside ecology" (1976:9). As services are provided along the roadside - improved tarmac surface for the road, buses, electricity, telephone, piped water supply - so those who are better-off buy up roadside plots and build on them. The poorer people shift away out of sight. The visitor then sees the better-off people and their houses, gardens, and services, and not the poorer people and theirs. Ribbon development along roadsides gives a false impression in many countries. The better the roads, the nearer the urban centre, and the higher the traffic, so the more pronounced is the roadside development and the more likely visitors are to see it and be misled.

Nor does roadside bias apply only to main roads. Within villages, the poorer people may be hidden from the main streets and the places where people meet. M. P. Moore and G. Wickremesinghe, reporting on a study of three villages in the Low Country of Sri Lanka, have this to say on "hidden poverty":

"In retrospect at least, one of the most obvious aspects of poverty in the study villages is the extent to which it is concealed from view ... the proportion of 'poor' households ... varies from 14% in Wattegama to 41% in Weligalagoda. Yet one could drive along all the motorable roads in the villages and scarcely see a single 'poor' house. Here, as in most of rural Sri Lanka, wealthier households use their social and economic power to obtain roadside homestead sites. Not only do these confer easier access to such tangible services as buses, electricity connections or hawkers, but they provide such intangible benefits as better information and gossip from passers-by. Equally, the roadside dweller has a potential site for opening a small shop, especially if located near the all-important road junctions, which provide the focus of

commerical and social life in almost all rural areas.  
To even see the houses of the poor one often has to  
leave the road. Many visitors, including public  
officers, appear not to do so very often."

(forthcoming: 98 My underlining)

Much the same can be said of harijan colonies in or near villages  
in South India.

It is not just officials and rural tourists who are trapped by these  
biases. Social science research is far from immune.. There are  
honourable exceptions, but urban and tarmac biases are sometimes  
evident in the choice of villages to study. Of all specialists,  
social anthropologists are perhaps the least susceptible; but even  
they have sometimes succumbed: as they have grown, Bangalore and  
Bangkok have each swallowed up a social anthropologist's village.  
Again, when Indian institutions were urged to adopt villages, two  
research and training organisations in Bangalore, unknown to each  
other, included the same village: it can scarcely be coincidence  
that it was close to the main Bangalore - Mysore road, a decent but  
not excessive distance clear of Bangalore itself. Within villages,  
too, the central more prosperous core is likely to attract researchers.  
Moore, again describing three villages in Sri Lanka, writes:

"Apart from the roadside issue, the core can exercise a great  
pull on the outsider who decides to do a few days a week of  
fieldwork. Apart from the facilities and the sense of being  
at the strategic hub of local affairs, it can claim a sense of  
history and tradition, to which sociologists especially appear  
vulnerable" (1979:3)

He considers that sociologists writing on Sri Lanka have focussed on  
core areas and completely ignored their peripheries. One may  
speculate about how generally the location of good informants and of  
facilities at the cores of villages prevents perception by social  
scientists of the peripheries and of the peripheral people.

Finally, fuel shortages and costs accentuate urban bias. Whenever  
governments make budget cuts, the travel vote is a favourite; it  
can be trimmed without visible loss. But each cut makes rural contact  
rarer and harder, and urban and tarmac bias is more pronounced. When  
fuel costs rise dramatically, as they have done in past years, the  
effect is especially marked in those poor countries without oil and

short of foreign exchange. Rural visits, research, and projects shrink back from more distant, often poorer, areas to those which are closer, more prosperous, and cheaper to visit.<sup>1</sup> District agricultural officers in Bangladesh have been severely restricted in the use of their vehicles. Cuts in transport allocations for staff responsible for supervising canal irrigation have occurred in India: likely effects are less supervision leading to less water to the already deprived tailends, and less knowledge of what is happening there. Every rise in oil prices both impoverishes the remoter, poorer people by tilting the urban-rural terms of trade against them more sharply, and at the same time reduces the chances of that deprivation being known. Visits, attention and projects are concentrated more in peri-urban areas which have the economic advantages of being closer to towns or cities.

ii) Project bias

Rural tourism and rural research exhibit a strong project bias. Those concerned with rural development and with rural research link in with networks of urban-rural contacts. They are then pointed to those rural places where something is happening - where money is being sent, staff are stationed, a project is in hand. Ministries, departments, district staff, and voluntary agencies all pay special attention to projects and channel visitors towards them. Contact and learning are then with tiny atypical islands of activity which attract repeated and mutually reinforcing attention.

Project bias is most marked with the showpiece: the nicely groomed, pet project or model village, specially staffed and supported, with well briefed members who know what to say, a reasonable but not

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<sup>1</sup> An early example was Zambia's fuel shortage following Rhodesia's unilateral declaration of independence in 1965 and which led to fuel rationing: one effect was that the Universities of Nottingham and Zambia joint research project concerned with the productivity of agricultural labour was restricted to work in two areas instead of three, and these were areas which were relatively well-developed agriculturally, having had large inputs of education, extension and communication (Elliott 1970:648).

excessive distance from the urban headquarters.<sup>1</sup> Governments in capital cities need such projects for foreign visitors; district staff and subdistrict staff need them too for visits by their senior officers. Such projects provide a quick and simple reflex to solve the problem of what to do with visitors or senior staff on inspection. Once again, they direct attention away from the rural poor.

The better known cases are those rural development projects which have attracted international attention. Any role of honour would include the Anand Dairy Cooperatives in India; the Chilalo Agricultural Development Unit in Ethiopia; the Comilla Project in Bangladesh; the Gezira Scheme in Sudan; the Intensive Agricultural Districts Programme (IADP) in India; Lilongwe in Malawi; the Muda Irrigation Project in Malaysia; the Mwea Irrigation Settlement in Kenya; and the Ujamaa programme in Tanzania. All of these have been much visited and much studied. Students seeking Ph.D's have read about them and then sought to do their fieldwork on them.<sup>2</sup> Research generates more research; and investment by donors draws research after it and funds it. In India, the IADP, a programme designed to increase production sharply in a few districts which were well endowed with water, exercised a powerful attraction to research compared with the rest of India. An analysis (Harriss 1977: 30-34) of rural social science research published in the

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<sup>1</sup> Or in one case close to the famous tourist site for the VIR J. K. Galbraith has remarked of India, as hopes and enthusiasm for community development waned, that "A number of show villages continued to impress the more susceptible foreign visitors". He records this incident: "In the spring of 1961, Lyndon Johnson, then vice president, was taken to see one of these villages in the neighbourhood of Agra. It was, of the several hundred thousand villages of India, the same one that Dwight D. Eisenhower had been shown a year or two before. It was impressive in its cleanliness, simple cultural life, handicrafts, and evidence of progressive agricultural techniques. Johnson, and old hand in problems of agricultural uplift and difficult to deceive, then demanded to see the adjacent village a mile or two away. After strong protesting words about its lack of preparation to receive him, he was taken there. This village, one judged, had undergone no major, technical, cultural, or hygienic change in the previous thousand years." (Galbraith 1979: 106-107)

<sup>2</sup> Mea culpa. In the 1960's so many students and other researchers were attracted to work on the (well-documented, well organised and well-known) Mwea Irrigation Settlement in Kenya that farmers complained about interview saturation.

Economic and Political Weekly showed an astonishing bias to IADP districts, and an almost total neglect of the very poor areas of central India. In a different way, the Comilla Project may have misled, since Comilla District has the lowest proportion of landless in any district in Bangladesh. Research on ujamaa in the latter 1960's focussed heavily on three exceptional villages or clusters of villages (the Ruvuma Development Association, Mbambara, and Upper Kitete) which were among the very few in the whole country with substantial communal agricultural production. Research, reports and publications have given all these atypical projects high profiles, and these in turn have generated more interest and more visitors.

Fame forces the managers of such projects into public relations. More and more of their time has to be spent showing visitors around. Flooded with the celebrated, the curious, and the ignorant - prime ministers, graduate students, women's groups, farmers' groups, aid missions, school parties, committees and directors of this and that - managers set up public relations units and develop a public relations style. Visitors then get the treatment. A fluent guide follows a standard routine and a standard route. The same people are met, the same buildings entered,<sup>1</sup> the same books signed, the same polite praise inscribed in the book against the visitors' names. Questions are drowned in statistics; doubts inhibited by handouts. Inquisitive visitors depart loaded with research papers, technical evaluations, and annual reports which they will never read. They leave with a sense of guilt at the unworthy scepticism which prompted probing questions, and with memories of some of those who are better-off in the special project, and of the charisma of the exceptional leader or manager who has created it. They write their journey reports, evaluations and articles on the basis of these impressions. For their part, the project staff have reinforced through repetition

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In February 1979, two British Members of Parliament visited the Anand Cooperatives in India. They saw and were impressed by the delivery of milk from small producers to one centre. Inside hung a photograph of James Callaghan, the British Prime Minister, taken during his visit to the same centre. Asked if they would like to see a second Centre they readily assented. Inside there they found another photograph, this time of the visit to that centre of Judith Hart, the British Minister of Overseas Development.

the beliefs which sustain their morale. Thus projects take off into self-sustaining myth.<sup>2</sup>

iii) Person biases

The persons with whom rural tourists, local-level officials, and rural researchers have contact, and from whom they obtain impressions and information, are biased against poorer people.

a) elite bias. "Elite" is used here to describe those rural people who are less poor and more influential. They typically include progressive farmers, village leaders, headmen, traders, religious leaders, teachers, and para-professionals. They are the main sources of information for rural tourists, for local-level officials, and even for rural researchers. They are the most fluent informants. It is they who receive and speak to the visitors; they who articulate "the village's" interests and wishes; their concerns which emerge as the village's priorities for development. It is they who entertain visitors, generously providing the expected feast or beverage. It is they who receive the lion's share of attention, advice and services from agricultural extension staff (Chambers 1974:58; Leonard 1977, Ch 9). It is they also who show visitors the progressive practices in their fields. It is they too, who, at first at least, monopolise the time and attention of the visitor.

Conversely, the poor do not speak up. With those of higher status, they may even decline to sit down. Weak, powerless and isolated, they are often reluctant to push themselves forward.

In Paul Devitt's words:

"The poor are often inconspicuous, inarticulate and unorganised. Their voices may not be heard at public meetings in communities where it is customary for only the big men to put their views. It is rare to find a body or institution

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This is intended as a statement of fact, not a judgement. There is something of the Greek tragedy in the way some conspicuous projects are driven down this path progressively to self-deception, hubris, defensiveness and ultimately debunking.

that adequately represents the poor in a certain community or area. Outsiders and government officials invariably find it more profitable and congenial to converse with local influentials than with the uncommunicative poor." (1977:23)

"The poor are a residual, the last in the line, the most difficult to find, and the hardest to learn from. "Unless paupers and poverty are deliberately and persistently sought, they tend to remain effectively screened from outside inquirers." (ibid. 24).

- b) Male bias. Most rural tourists, local-level government staff, and researchers are men. Most rural people with whom they establish contact are men. Female farmers are neglected by male agricultural extension workers. In most societies women have inferior status and are subordinate to men. There are variations and exceptions; but quite often women are shy to speak to visitors, especially men. And yet poor rural women are a poor and deprived class within a class. They often work very long hours, and they are usually paid less than men. Rural single women, women heads of households, and widows include many of the most wretched and unseen people in the world.
- c) user and adopter biases. Where visits are concerned with facilities or innovations, the users of services and the adopters of new practices are more likely to be seen than are non-users and non-adopters. This applies to visitors who have a professional interest in, say, education, health or agriculture, to local-level officials, and to researchers. They tend to visit buildings and places where activity is concentrated, easily visible, and studiable. Children in school are then more likely to be seen and questioned than those children who are not in school; those who use the health clinic than those who are too sick, too poor, or too distant to use it; those who come to market because they have goods to sell or money with which to buy than those who stay at home because they have neither; members of the cooperative, than those who are too poor or powerless to join it; those who have adopted new agricultural, health or family planning practices than those who have not.
- d) active, present and living biases. Those who are active are more visible than those who are not. Fit happy children gather round



the Jeep or Landrover, not those who are weak and miserable. Dead children are rarely seen. The sick lie in their huts. Inactive old people are often out of sight; a social anthropologist has recorded how he spent some time camping outside a village before he realised that old people were starving (Turnbull 1973: 102). Those who are absent or dead cannot be met; but those who have migrated and those who have died may include many of the most deprived. Much of the worst poverty is hidden by its removal.

iv) Dry season bias

Most of the poor rural people in the world live in areas of marked wet-dry seasonality, most of it tropical. For the great majority whose livelihoods depend on cultivation the most difficult time of the year is usually the wet season, especially before the first harvest. Food is short, food prices high, work hard, and infections prevalent. Malnutrition, morbidity and mortality all rise; body weights decline. The poorer people, women and children are particularly vulnerable. Birth weights drop and neonatal mortality rises. Child care is poor. Desperate people get indebted. This is both the hungry season and the sick season. It is also the season of ratchets, of irreversible downward movements into poverty through the sale or mortgaging of assets, the time when poor people are most likely to become poorer.<sup>1</sup>

It is also the unseen season. Rural visits by urban-based people have their own seasonality.<sup>2</sup> There are some agriculturalists and

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<sup>1</sup> For the statements in this paragraph, see the papers of the Conference on Seasonal Dimensions to Rural Poverty summarised in Chambers *et al.* 1979, and further examined in Longhurst and Payne 1979 and Chambers 1979b.

<sup>2</sup> A little doggeral:

Nutritionists with careful plan  
conduct their surveys when they can  
be sure the weather's fine and dry,  
the harvest in, food intake high.

Then students seeking Ph.D's  
believe that everyone agrees  
that rains don't do for rural study  
- suits get wet and shoes get muddy.

And bureaucrats, of urban type  
wait prudently till crops be ripe  
before they venture far afield  
to ask politely: what's the yield,

For monsoonal Asia which has its major crop towards the end  
of the calendar year, it is also relevant that

The international experts' flights  
have other seasons; winter nights  
in London, Washington and Rome  
are what drive them, in flocks, from home

since they then descend on India and other countries in January  
and February at just the time of least poverty and when celebrations  
and marriages are to be seen and heard.

epidemiologists - who for professional reasons may make a point of rural travel during the rains; for that is when crops grow and bugs and bacteria breed. But the disincentives are strong. The rains are a bad time for rural travel because of floods, mud, broken bridges, getting stuck, damaging vehicles, losing time, and enduring discomfort. In some places roads are officially closed. In the South Sudan there is a period of about two months after the onset of the rains when roads are impassable but when there is not yet enough water in the rivers for travel by boat. Many rural areas, especially and precisely those which are remote and poor, are quite simply inaccessible by vehicle during the rains. The worst times of year for the poorer people are then those least seen by urban-based outsiders.

But once the rains are over they can travel more freely. It is in the dry season, when disease is diminishing, the harvest in, food stocks adequate, body weights rising, ceremonies in full swing, and people at their least deprived, that there is most contact between urban-based professionals and the rural poor. Not just rural development tourism, but rural appraisal generally is liable to a dry season bias.<sup>1</sup> The poorest people are most seen at precisely the times when they are least deprived; and least seen when things are worst.

v) Biases of politeness, and timidity

Rural tourists, local-level officials, and researchers may all be deterred by combinations of politeness and timidity from approaching, meeting, and listening to and learning from the poorer people. Poverty in any country may be a subject of indifference or shame, something to be shut out, something polluting, something, in the psychological sense, to be repressed. Those who make contact with it may offend those who are influential. The notables who generously offer hospitality to the visitor may not welcome searching questions about the poorer people.

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<sup>1</sup> A manual for assessing rural needs, warning about the unexpected in rural surveys, says "Once, the jeeps needed for transporting the interviewers were recalled for a month during the few precious months of the dry season" (Ashe 1979:26, my underlining).

Senior officials visiting junior officials may not wish to examine or expose failures of programmes to benefit the poor. Politeness and prudence variously inhibit the awkward question, the walk into the poorer quarter of the village, the discussion with the working women, the interviews with harijans. Courtesy and cowardice combine against contact with the poorest people.

vi) Professional biases

Finally, professional training, values and interests present problems. Sometimes they focus attention on the less poor: agricultural extension staff trained to advise on cash crops or to draw up farm plans, are drawn to the more "progressive" farmers; historians, sociologists and administrators, especially when short of time, can best satisfy their interests and curiosity through informants among the better-educated or less poor; those engaged in family welfare and family planning work find that bridgeheads for the adoption of new practices can most readily be established with better-off, better-educated families. But sometimes, also, professional training, values and interests focus attention directly on the poor: especially in the fields of nutrition and health, those wishing to examine and work with pathological conditions will tend to be drawn to the poorer people.

More generally, specialisation, for all its advantages, makes it difficult for observers to see the holism of poverty. As suggested above, rural poverty is a syndrome in which lack of assets, inadequate flows of food and income, physical weakness and sickness, vulnerability to contingencies, powerlessness, and isolation interact and interlock. But professional training conditions otherwise intelligent people to look for and see fewer things. Professionals have been programmed by their education and experience to examine what shows up in a bright and slender beam which blinds them to what lies outside it. Knowing what they want to know, and short of time to find it out, professionals in rural areas become even more narrowly single-minded. They do their own thing and only their own thing. They look for and find what fits their paradigms. There is neither inclination nor time for the open-ended question or for other ways of seeing things. "He that seeketh, findeth". Visiting the same village, a hydrologist enquires

about the water table, a soils scientist examines soil fertility, an agronomist investigates yields, an economist asks about wages and prices, a sociologist looks into patron-client relations, an administrator examines the tax collection record, a doctor investigates hygiene and health, a nutritionalist studies villagers' diets, and a family planner tries to find out about attitudes to numbers of children. Some may be sensitive to the holism of poverty, but none is likely to be able to fit together all, or even most of the negative factors as they affect the poorer people. They will not then be fully aware of the mutually reinforcing nature of the linkages of poverty. Perhaps because of professional specialisation, there are few general case studies of poor families; where they do exist (e.g. Lewis 1959; Ledesma 1977) they provide valuable insights which a specialist might miss. Perhaps most seriously of all, specialisation prevents outsiders from seeing the world from the point of view of the poorer people. It impedes the necessary reversal of learning from them and with them. Their priorities, freely identified and expressed, may surprise. They may also fall in or between the domains of several disciplines. If professionalism is narrow, it encourages over-specialised and misleading diagnoses and prescriptions which underestimate poverty by recognising and confronting only part of the problem.

#### The Unseen and the Unknown

The argument must not be overstated. To most of these generalisations about biases, exceptions can be found. There are government programmes, voluntary organisations, and research projects that seek out those who are remote and poor. Some projects and programmes, such as those for the weaker sections and vulnerable classes in rural India, have an anti-poverty focus. Person biases can work the other way: women's groups and women's programmes attract attention; doctors are taken to those who are sick; nutritionists concentrate on the malnourished; agriculturalists and epidemiologists alike may have special professional reasons for travel during the rains; and during an agricultural season, a day-time visit to a village may provide encounters with the sick, aged and very young, and not with the able-bodied who are out in the fields. Exceptions such as these must be noted. At the same time, there are two dangers of underestimating the force of the biases: first, a failure

to see how they interlock; and second, underestimating their incidence.

politeness,

First, the way in which spatial, project, person, dry season, and professional biases interact can be seen by analysing almost any example of an urban-based outsider investigating rural conditions. With many "insights" and beliefs about rural life, several biases reinforce each other. The prosperity after harvest of a male farmer on a project besides a main road close to a capital city may colour the perceptions of a succession of officials and dignitaries. The plight of a poor widow starving and sick in the wet season in a remote and inaccessible area may never in any way impinge on the consciousness of anyone outside her own community, and not all of them.

Second, few may be immune to these biases. It may be supposed that those who originate from rural areas, or who have a home or second home there, will not suffer from them. Any such supposition might be misleading. The evidence available is too anecdotal and sketchy to be more than suggestive; but the suggestion is rather strong. Three instances can be cited.

In the first case, in a densely populated part of western Kenya, junior agricultural extension staff and home economics workers were each given a random sample of 100 households to survey. The households were in the area where they worked. After the survey, they all considered that the sample had been biased heavily against the more progressive and better educated households. One of the agricultural staff complained that in his 100 households there was only one which had an exotic grade cow, and that there should have been several more if the sample had been representative; but in fact, in the area, there was only one exotic grade cow for every 200 households, so that he had only a 50:50 chance of getting a grade cow at all. A home economics worker said that she was appalled at the poverty she had encountered among her sample. On two occasions she had burst into tears at what she had found. She had not known that there was such misery in the area. "These people do not come to my meetings." Now it is possible that this was a one-off case. More likely, in my view, the anti-poverty biases affect local-level staff as well as others, and they generally underperceive deprivation in the areas where they work.

The second instance is from Sri Lanka. After observing how the houses of the poor are physically hidden from the core of the villages they studied, and how public officers appear not to see them very often, Moore and Wickremesinghe continue (forthcoming:98)

"Although most of the rural population ... are poor and dependent in part or whole on wage labour, one hears comments of the nature: "Of course, most of the people around here have some job or little business in Colombo.""

The implication is of other incomes and modest well-being, which might be true of those who were better off, and with whom there was contact, but scarcely of those who were poorer and with whom there was no contact.

In the third instance, a senior official in a ministry in a capital city stated that in his rural home area no one ever went short of food. But a social anthropologist working in the area reported that during the annual hungry season, women were interviewed who said they had not eaten for three days. There was food in the shops nearby.

Perhaps what we are considering here is a world-wide phenomenon, as marked in rich urban as in poor rural agricultural society. Compared with others, the poor are unseen and unknown. Their deprivation may then be worse than is recognised by those in positions of power and influence.

Finally, we may note what else rural tourists, local-level staff and even researchers often miss. It is not just the poorer people; it is also what is not visible: international influences on rural deprivation; social relations (patron-client, indebtedness, webs of obligation and exploitation); and trends over time. The very act of being in a rural area and trying to learn about it biases insights and interpretations towards what can be seen; and the observer's specialisation then increases the likelihood of partial diagnoses, explanations and prescriptions. Poor people on disaster courses may not be recognised. A nutritionist may see malnutrition but not the seasonal indebtedness, the distress sales of land, and the local power structure which generate it. A doctor may see infant mortality but not the declining real wages which are driving some mothers to desperation, still less the causes of those declining real wages. Visibility and specialisation combine to direct attention in rural development to simple surface symptoms rather than deeper combinations of causes.

### Remedial Action

To suggest remedial action implies that it is bad not to perceive the nature and extent of rural poverty. This assumption might be challenged on several grounds. It could be argued that it is not necessary to know more about the poor because of trickle-down - "everyone gains from growth"; because directing resources and attention to the poorer has a high opportunity cost - "We can do more for less for the less poor"; because indigenous social institutions take care of the deprived adequately - "The poor look after their own"; because of historical inevitability - "Whatever will be, will be"; or because the effort is useless - "We know it can't be done". Each of these points could be debated at length. Perhaps it is enough here to note them, to disagree, and to recognise that they conflict with the philosophy and aims of most rural development, which has the stated purpose of reaching and helping those who are poorer. The World Bank has defined rural development as involving "extending the benefits of development to the poorest among those who seek a livelihood in the rural areas" (World Bank 1975:3). It is difficult to envisage how initiatives in such rural development can be effective, unless those responsible for policy, planning and implementation have knowledge and understanding of those poorest people. It is in this spirit that suggestions for remedial action are made.

Remedies require changes in cognition and behaviour. This involves not just learning in the sense of adding to what is known, but structural cognitive change. This involves mental constructs and concepts, ways of seeing and understanding the world, and especially ways of seeing and understanding poverty. How cognitive and behavioural change interact, and how they can be manipulated, is treated in extensive psychological literature, much of it concerned with psychotherapy.<sup>1</sup> Three points can be noted. First, even those unsympathetic

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<sup>1</sup> By way of entry into some of the literature, see Feldman 1966; Mahoney 1974; and Kanfer and Goldstein eds 1975. There is a rich range of techniques in both humanistic and behavioural psychology. Techniques in behavioural psychology are now often described as behaviour modification, and rely on the manipulation of rewards and sanctions. While raising ethical questions, behaviour modification makes claims to be rapidly effective for some purposes (Bootzin 1975; Azrin and Foxx 1977). More generally the range of techniques for achieving change, can be illustrated by thirteen chapter headings in Helping People Change (Kanfer and Goldstein, eds). The techniques are: relationship enhancement; attitude modification; cognitive change; model simulation and role-playing; operant; fear reduction, aversion; self-management; self instructional; expectation; hypnosis and suggestion; group; and automation. I make no pretence to have reviewed this literature. But it is worth pointing out that it exists and that it may contain usable ideas.



to behavioural approaches concede that the manipulation of rewards and sanctions can have a powerful influence on behaviour. Second, for changes in cognition and belief, group approaches appear to be more effective and more cost-effective than many others. Third, public statements of intention, attitude or belief made among peers have a rather strong tendency to influence subsequent behaviour and cognition. These points have been incorporated in some of the suggestions which follow:

1) Tactics for tourists

The discussion of rural development tourism was negative, itself a bias. The point is not to attack or prevent it, but rather, accepting it as necessary, to improve it. Readers reflecting on their own experiences and techniques will have noted how often and how well they have avoided or broken away from the tendencies described; and how often, willingly or not, they have been trapped by them. It is encouraging to remember the example of Wolf Ladejinsky. A man of wide experience, he carried out two brief field trips in India in 1969, at the age of 70, and wrote them up in the Economic and Political Weekly (Ladejinsky 1969a and b). He visited the Punjab and the Kosi area in Bihar. His methods were mixed, and he used surveys and official statistics as well as tourism. He had the skill and experience to see through, as early as this, to the ironies and ills of the green revolution: "The new agricultural policy which has generated growth and prosperity is also the indirect cause of the widening of the gap between the rich and the poor" (1969a:13). What others years later plodded to document to two decimal places, he rumbled convincingly in a week or two, exposing, decisively and without delay, the major trends and implications.

For lesser mortals, such heights may be out of reach. But for rural visits concerned with poverty there are tactics which help. If these are obvious, once stated, to the point of banality, I can only say that it is remarkable how often they are ignored, at least by myself. They are

- a) Offsetting the anti-poverty biases. Urban, tarmac and roadside biases can be countered by going further afield and by walking

away from roads; project bias by visiting not only projects but other areas near them, or by non-scheduled stops; biases of personal contact by deliberately seeking out the poorer people, by making a point of meeting women, by taking time to seek out those who are sick at home and not at the clinic, by asking about those who have left or who have died; dry season bias by visiting during the rains, or at least asking about the worst times of the year; the biases of politeness by breaking away from the courtesies and making it clear what is sought; professional biases by seeking through introspection to see the limitations imposed by professional conditioning, by trying to widen spans of perception, and by asking open-ended questions.

- b) Spending longer. In many ways the poorer people are at the end of the line. They take the longest to reach; they are the last to speak; they are the least organised, the least articulate and the most fearful. They often keep a low profile. Some are migrants. In visits that are rushed, they are the people least likely to be encountered. It is after the courtesies, after the planned programme, after the tourist has ceased to be a novelty, that contact becomes easier. As we have seen, rural development tourism is vulnerable to a host of delays and disasters which reduce the time available. The serious "poverty watcher", to use Mick Moore's phrase (1979), must allow plenty of time in one place. It helps to spend the night, to talk after dark, unhurriedly, and to eat together if it can be done unexploitatively.
- c) Being unimportant. The cavalcade of cars, the clouds of dust, the reception committees and the protracted speeches of the VIP's visit generate well-known problems. By contrast, the visitor who comes simply, by bicycle or on foot, fits more easily and disturbs and distracts less. Unscheduled visits, walking and asking about things that are seen, planning not to have a special programme, and avoiding the impression of having influence over benefits which a community might receive, all reduce the dangers of special or misleading responses and impressions.

d) Listening and learning. If a tourist believes that there is nothing to learn from rural people, much is lost before starting. A reversal of roles, with the outsider as pupil, listening and learning, is needed. Closed questions impose meanings; open-ended questions and discussions lead into areas the visitor does not know to ask about. There is much to be discovered about what rural people know, but arrogance and status all too often prevent it being learnt.

ii) Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA)<sup>1</sup>

Rural appraisal by urban-based people is often inefficient. The trade-offs between cost of information-gathering, and the quantity, accuracy, relevance and actual use of information are badly managed. Appraisal is often either quick-and-dirty or long-and-dirty, where dirty means not cost-effective. Uncritical rural tourism is often quick-and-dirty, with the biases noted. But equally, long research - the extensive questionnaire surveys with dispersed investigators collecting mountains of "data", and the prolonged total immersion of classical social anthropology - are both quite often long-and-dirty. The challenge is to search for more cost-effective "fairly-quick-and-fairly-clean" techniques, using the principles of optimal ignorance and proportionate inaccuracy.<sup>2</sup>

Some techniques have been collated elsewhere (Chambers 1980). Three are of particular relevance for an orientation towards poorer people. First, key integrating indicators may be used to assess poverty and to identify poorer people. They may be appropriate either for showing the relative poverty of an area or of a group, or within the area or group for identifying those who are poorer. Quality of housing is frequently referred to. Others

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<sup>1</sup> For a review of a workshop on RRA held on 26-27 October 1978, see Barnett 1979. Many of the papers of a subsequent conference on RRA held on 4-7 December 1979 are listed in the references in Chambers 1980

<sup>2</sup> The principle of proportionate inaccuracy is that costs should not be incurred to achieve greater accuracy than can be used.

include tangible assets (tools, beds, cooking utensils, clothing). Low birth weights of children also conflate several aspects of deprivation. Inventories or sales of soap have been suggested (Honadle 1979) as indicators of changes over time in poverty or prosperity in an area. Indicators such as these, appropriately verified, may be used to avoid more detailed, expensive and long-drawn-out research. Second, key informants - social anthropologists, social workers, leaders of poor groups, university students doing field research - can help efficiently to shortcut long investigations. Third, combinations of group appraisal, with teams of investigators changing partners and discussing findings each evening, may provide an especially efficient method for maintaining commitment and learning about the poorer rural people.<sup>3</sup>

The relevance of RRA is releasing time from excessive data collection so that it can be used for more contact with and learning about and from those who are poorer. RRA may be a key to overcoming the endemic problems of shortage of time which shut the poorer people out. More time could be used to let them in. There are dangers of the obverse of Parkinson's law - of time shrinking to fit work - but awareness of these dangers might reduce their incidence. Techniques of RRA, carefully developed and used, should have a part to play in improving awareness and understanding of rural poverty.

iii) in-service research as training

Unless there is a powerful countervailing ideology, in-service training is liable to reinforce elite preconceptions and stereotypes about poverty, insofar as poverty is considered a subject at all. The rather mixed and often disappointing experiences with public sector training for management in developing countries (e.g. Stifel *et al.* eds, 1977) might lead to premature pessimism. There may be more room for

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<sup>1</sup> See papers by Hildebrand (1978, 1979a, 1979b) for pioneering applications in appraisal for agricultural research.

manoeuvre, despite elitist biases, than is recognised. One set of possibilities is incorporating poverty-related research into sequences of in-service training. Three suggestions can be made:

- a) surveys. The use of surveys for generating systematic knowledge has obscured their value for training. Simple but systematic surveys can be a learning tool for those who carry them out. Random sample surveys, as in the example cited earlier (p20), if followed up with discussion, may enable staff to form a more balanced view of an environment. Surveys with target populations of those who are especially deprived could be used to correct imbalanced views in a more direct and pointed way. Well designed techniques for exploratory and reconnaissance surveys can also provide new insights (see e.g. Carruthers 1979; Collinson 1979; Hildebrand 1979a). Familiarisation for project staff might be achieved efficiently through quick surveys, perhaps focussing on key indicators and on a few in-depth case studies (Chambers 1978). For correcting biases of perception and for learning about the condition and problems of the poorer people, surveys have much to recommend them.
- b) poverty-focussed research. In-service training might require participants to carry out more detailed and focussed research on poverty. Many suggestions can be made. An illustrative list is:
- family case studies: a day in the life of a landless household, how a poor family survives the hungry season, etc.
  - applications of the critical incident approach,<sup>1</sup> in which respondents mention significant incidents in their life and work, which are then discussed and explored. For poor families, attention might directed towards contingencies and ratchets of impoverishment

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See Montgomery et al 1975 for an application of this approach to defining training needs for the management of development projects. With rural poverty, it could be used comparatively and inductively to identify anti-poverty measures and their relative priorities.

- exploring practices, knowledge and attitudes relevant to programmes (health practices and beliefs, practices affecting fertility, agricultural activities, etc)
- non-users and non-adopters: seeking out and trying to understand the problems and attitudes of those who do not use services and who do not adopt new practices

For such research, good rapport is needed; and this may require village residence. This has been practised by the Peace Corps in some countries as part of induction, and could be much more widely used to include officials on in-service training.<sup>2</sup> The quality of insight gained might be very variable. Ideally, those taking part would be enabled to make a complete mental reversal, and to see the world, even if temporarily, the other way round, from the point of view of poor people, from the bottom up.<sup>3</sup>

C) groups, workshops and seminars. Both surveys and poverty-focussed research may have more long-term impact on cognition and behaviour if they are part of a sequence of group activities. Before a survey or poverty-focussed research, public commitment could be sought from participants, combined with a discussion of objectives, methods, and problems anticipated. After the survey or research, subsequent workshops or seminars with reporting back, discussion, and comparison of findings would serve to elicit and strengthen changes which participants were experiencing. A practical policy-orientation, including group commitment to subsequent action, should also reinforce and build on the changes. Of particular importance might be new understanding of why poor people do not use services or adopt practices, and subsequent programme changes taking these reasons into account.

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<sup>2</sup> Objections can be expected. A senior UN official to whom this was suggested said that the health risks to his staff would be unacceptable.

<sup>3</sup> For a social anthropological example of this sort of reversal, see Mencher 1975.

iv) games and role-playing

Games and role-playing are underdeveloped approaches for understanding poverty. There are, however, examples where participants learn by playing the parts of poorer people. OXFAM has developed a Poultry Game which aims at understanding the difficulties of a farmer in a village in the third world (and which has players as both farmers and labourers, with the labourers at a disadvantage without fenced runs), and a Poverty Game in which players group as villages, make seasonal crop decisions, are subject to contingencies determined by cards (as with the "Chance" pile of cards in Monopoly), and are exposed to malnutrition and disease. Dowler and Elston, (1979), building on the work of Chapman (1973, 1974), have devised a Green Revolution Game in which postgraduate students in human nutrition play farmers who make seasonal decisions for crops, fertilisers, pesticides, and longer-term investment in conditions of uncertainty; outcomes are mediated by a small computer programme developed from Chapman's empirical data from Bihar.

Despite these examples, the potential of games for generating insight into the life, problems and attitudes of poor rural people appears largely unrealised. The Green Revolution game developed at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine appears to have been not only popular but also revealing to the participants: some players, for example, have become landless through bad luck or bad decisions and have had to survive by hiring out their labour to those with land; while others have benefitted, again through luck or good judgement or both, from land concentration. One possibility is that participants in in-service training should create their own poverty games on the basis of information gained through their own research; and should then play them. It should be possible to build into such games aspects such as indebtedness, malnutrition, infant mortality, the non-use of services, and the like. On reflection, it is astonishing that such approaches to learning are not widely used - in public administration training, in universities, and in courses for the staff of aid agencies.

A further possibility is playing games with rural people themselves. In Ecuador, a simulation game called Hacienda has been developed and used as a complement to consciencization of campesinos (Smith n.d).

although it can hardly have failed also to educate those who devised and introduced it. Indigenous games can also provide points of entry to help outsiders learn from rural people (Barker 1979). Games can be used to elicit the mental constructs of different groups of people and the ways in which they construe elements of their environment. In Sierra Leone, Paul Richards has used a technique based on Kelly's personal construct theory. This is the triads test,<sup>1</sup> in which respondents are presented with elements (often objects) in groups of three and asked to pair two on the basis of similarity and separate the third on the basis of difference. Repeated for different groups of three from a population of elements, this elicits respondents' constructs, and reveals how different people view the same objects. In Sierra Leone, weeds were presented to University botany and geography students, to farmers and to agricultural extension trainees. The constructs of the university students reflected a preoccupation with morphology and Linnean taxonomy. Those of the farmers brought out difficulties of clearing and secondary medical uses. The surprise came with the extension trainees. Richards reports that they:

"produced grids almost identical to those of the university students with constructs such as root/non-root; round leaf/multiple leaf; hair on stem/no hair on stem; hairs on leaf/no hairs on leaf predominating. This proved to be of significant 'diagnostic' value, leading to a spontaneous 'seminar' by the trainees on how they would communicate with farmers if their 'scientific' approach to farming made them think in text-book botanical terms rather than in terms of farming utilities. Tentative action proposals for syllabus development and for studying alongside the farmers were beginning to emerge at the end of the period."

(1979:32)

There may be other approaches from psychotherapy which could also be used to enable those working on rural development quickly and effectively to understand the construct systems of rural people.

A final suggestion is simulations with role-playing. One variant is theatre, dramatising common events or crises for poor people. Another is for role reversals, for people who are powerful to play the parts of those who are weak. Dramatising events such as encounters between

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For further techniques see Fransella and Bannister 1977.



officials and poorer rural people may enable spectators to "look in on" and see in a new way, from the other party's point of view, situations which are a commonplace of their work.

v) Reversals: Learning From and Working With

Running through many of these suggestions is the theme of reversal: reversing the positions and insights of urban against rural, educated against non-educated, rich against poor, and powerful against weak. Perhaps the most significant reversal is in the roles of teacher and pupil, with rural people as teachers and outsiders as pupils. This conflicts with the assumptions and conditioning of modern education and professional training which imparts the prejudice that modern scientific knowledge is not only superior to indigenous technical knowledge (ITK), but also invests superior status and authority in those who are its bearers. In the words of the Bible (Ecclesiastes 9:16) "... the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard." Yet there has been repeated evidence of the validity of ITK, as with intercropping where indigenous technology has proved superior to that of agricultural scientists (Belshaw 1979). A first step is to recognise that rural people often have much detailed knowledge, their own categories, and their own systems of meaning, and that there is often much to learn both about and from these. Indeed, it is ironical that in many environments the most easily acquired knowledge that would be new to the modern scientific network is often that which those who have been educated are least likely to recognise, acquire, or write up: the knowledge of rural people.

The case must not be overstated. ITK is superior in some respects and some fields; and modern scientific knowledge in others (see Richards 1979 for an analysis). But ITK is not known to the outsider until an attempt is made to find it out, and that attempt is often not made.

"Learning from" can sometimes be most effective by "workingwith". This can be illustrated best from agriculture. Recognition of the rationality of the behaviour of small farmers (earlier thought to be primitive,

conservative, and backward), acceptance by agricultural scientists of small farmers as professionals and colleagues, and collaborative experimental work on farmers' fields with farmers, are all spreading. A further step taken by a few has been to work at farm tasks with farmers in their fields. Richards (1979) has remarked on the value of this as a learning process. Hatch in Peru did this systematically through the many operations of maize cultivation, hiring himself out to farmers as an un-paid labourer on condition they would teach him the task to be performed.

"The scheme worked beautifully. Most small farmers took to their role as teacher very conscientiously. Rather than waiting to respond to my questions, they often volunteered task information I would never have known enough to inquire about. In fact, most of the information I gathered was gained in this way. Hired labourers often proved excellent instructors as well". (Hatch 1976:16)

He found among other things that crop labour requirements might be half as much again as those estimated by outsiders (ibid. 11).

"Learning from and working with" may have more potential in agriculture than in say, health and nutrition. That is a question for investigation. But in all cases, unless present practices, beliefs and attitudes are sympathetically understood by outsiders, interventions are liable to be misguided. With rural people generally, and with the poorer people in particular, outsiders have to put themselves in the position of humble learners before they can establish how much they have to learn. It may often be more than they expect. Moreover, it is from the poorer people that they will expect to learn least, although it is the poorer people who are the best authorities on themselves.

vi) Rewards: prestige and promotion

All these suggestions are kicking against the pricks. The inherent tendencies of the biases of knowledge and contact and of cores and peripheries, exercise gravitational pulls away from the poorer rural people. Why should those in positions of influence, at whatever level, behave differently? It would be unrealistic to reply that exposure to poverty is likely to be sufficient. The capacity for

having eyes that see but minds that contrive to distort, repress and rationalise is one of the greatest human wonders. A major element in any change in cognition and behaviour must probably lie in rewards and incentives. The problems here are daunting. For a few outstanding individuals there are motives of idealism which lead them to work with and for the poorer people. But while such work is regarded as of little professional interest, of low prestige, dirty, polluting, demeaning, disturbing, and unrewarding, only a small minority will take that path. The system of rewards, prestige and promotion has to change if the majority of those concerned with rural development are to change.

There are no panaceas, but suggestions can be made. Together, their combined effects should be greater than the sum of their effects taken separately:

- a) changes in professional values in the citadels of professionalism. This refers to professional associations based in rich countries, to the editorial policies of high status international journals, to the textbooks and curricula of universities, to the research priorities of academics, to the types of research and writing which are valued. Conversion of the cores, in rich countries, is a crucial, but under-recognised part of this process.
- b) leadership and rhetoric. Leadership, when politicians and senior officials show by example that they attach priority to the poorer people, has some effect. The language and rhetoric of development do also have an influence; at its least, if poverty-orient it legitimates the work of those who wish to help the poorer people; more hopefully, it can provide preconditions for shifting programmes and bureaucracies towards the poorer.
- c) prestige accorded at the international, national and subnational levels to those who do good work with and for the poor. Nobel Prizes, like that to Mother Teresa, are at one extreme; at the other there are many forms that recognition can take. And where they do not exist they might be created. Some of those

who have innovated with primary health care might be candidates for awards. . . . Invitations to conferences are another form of encouragement, already practised, but which might be extended and pointed towards more of those whose good work has gone unrecognised.

- d) career requirements for civil servants to spend proportions of their time either in remote poor areas or with special responsibilities for poverty programmes or for poverty-oriented training. This requirement might be used to overcome the widespread practice of the "penal" posting to a poor rural area of an official who for one reason or another is out of favour.
- e) initiating village-level projects (as with antyodya in Rajasthan) which identify the poorest households and have programmes specifically for them; and which then are the object of attention of supervisors and visitors.
- f) valuing new types of research and writing. This is already happening but slowly. Far too little is still known or written, at the level of personal or family detail, about the lives and problems of poorer rural people. Family case studies are still quite rare. New styles and priorities in rural research, especially perhaps by university students during their vacations, might set new patterns. ITK presents major opportunities for additions to published knowledge.
- g) Strengthening the poverty-orientation of monitoring and evaluation so that those working on programmes and projects increasingly feel that their work will be judged by its impact on poorer people. This includes awareness, in monitoring and evaluation, of those who migrate and die, and those who do not take up services or otherwise benefit (Chambers 1978).
- h) promotions. This is critical and difficult. There are those, but they are a small minority, who will devote themselves to work with and for the poorer people without regard to personal

advancement or financial benefit. For the great majority, the status and financial incentives of promotion weigh heavily. The problem is then how to ensure that effective poverty-oriented work is rewarded by promotion. Answers may have to differ according to political and administrative systems and may never be easy. But it should not be thought that there is little scope here. Attempted alone, a policy of promotion for good work with and for the poor may seem improbable. Supported by other initiatives and changes in values, promotion might be a strong tool for changing personal priorities and behaviour.

#### Conclusion

The difficulties of development for and with the poorer rural people of the third world are immense. No purpose is served by underestimating them. Many biases tilt against them. The enormity of the problems may induce some to despair, cynicism, fatalism, and a search for one big solution. But great problems can be broken down into small parts which can be tackled one by one. In suggesting that some of these parts are cognitive and behavioural, there is no intention to present this as a panacea. Cognitive and behavioural change on the part of those who are influential - political leaders, senior and junior officials, persons from aid agencies, and others involved in policy and implementation - cannot be expected to come easily. But at least there is room for manoeuvre. How wide that room is will be clearer when more experience has been gained. In the meantime, measures to change and reverse thinking and behaviour appear well worth exploring as one set of thrusts, perhaps a key one, for reducing rural poverty.

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