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The State and Rural Development:
Ideologies and an Agenda
for the 1990s

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THE STATE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT: IDEOLOGIES AND
AN AGENDA FOR THE 1990s

by

Robert Chambers

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Successive ideological fashions in development differ in detail but share the same bias of originating in the cores and being imposed on the peripheries. In the 1970s, redistribution with growth was advocated through neo-Fabian extension of state organisations; in the 1980s, state organisations are to be slimmed in line with neo-liberal prescription. Neither ideology has paid adequate attention to rural grass-roots realities, especially the conditions and priorities of rural people and of field staff.

Learning from the experiences of the 1970s and 1980s, an agenda for rural development in the 1990s can be based on an ideology of reversals which starts with the priorities and interests of poor rural people. The agenda varies according to local conditions, but has common features. Recommendations about the role of the state in this process are outlined, the guiding principle being that the state, besides protector and provider, should also be liberator and enabler for the poor, permitting and promoting for them both diversity and choice.

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THE STATE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT: IDEOLOGIES AND AN AGENDA FOR THE 1990s

"We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, And we have done those things which we ought not to have done, And there is no health in us." The Book of Common Prayer

IDEOLOGIES AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

To generalise about the state and rural development in the South is rash. Almost any statement needs qualification. It is difficult to talk in the same breath about, say, Angola and the Andaman Islands, Togo and Thailand, India and Iran, or Cyprus and Kampuchea. Nations vary physically, economically and socially, and are politically diverse. Within national boundaries there are regional differences, and within regions ethnic, social and economic differences between households and people. Any commentator is also influenced and limited by personal experience, in my case largely in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, on which this paper is based.

These obvious problems have done little to inhibit the search for general policies and their dissemination. National policy-makers need laws and programmes for whole countries. Aid agencies with large budgets, especially the Banks, need packages to promote. Academics need ideologies to dissect and denounce. Institutions and their members need and seek shared values and concepts to sustain solidarity and to support effective activities, especially where they have direct responsibility for policy. And all these need a common language and set of concerns for dialogue and debate, for securing and legitimating flows of funds, and as a framework for thought and action.

Historically, the fashions for ideologies, packages, and programmes in rural development have changed. In part, this reflects changing rural conditions. The community development ethos and programmes of the 1950s, and the stress on agricultural extension and the dissemination of innovations of the 1960s, look dated and wrong now, even naive, with their stress on cultural obstacles to change, on community self-help construction, and on early adopters and laggards. Yet in the conditions of the time, they fitted better than they do now. The lesson is to see ideology and action in context, not as constants, but as arising from and adapting to, as well as moulding, those conditions. In this view,

they are always likely to be out-of-date, always requiring an imaginative effort to be ahead of current convention. This could support a forced straining for originality, change for its own sake, and new fashions to sustain the market for consultants, advice, technical assistance, and research. What it should support is a continuous effort to see what best to do for the future. There will always be changing perceptions and policies. Given the centralisation of power and communications with which we live, we have to generalise; not to do so is to generalise by default. The problem is how to do it better.

It is modestly in that spirit that this paper addresses the question of an agenda for state action in rural development in the 1990s. It approaches this with an historical view of neo-Fabian prescriptions of the 1970s and neo-liberal prescriptions of the 1980s, and then with a contemporary view, from below, of the rural conditions which both these have tended to miss.

Neo-Fabians in the 1970s: redistribution with growth

If the 1960s saw the zenith of national planning, the 1970s experienced only a slow decline. In a Fabian tradition, government organisation was seen as a principal instrument for action against poverty. In many countries national plans had high profiles, and set styles and patterns to be followed also at lower levels, in rural regions and districts. In both decades, in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), major and widespread attempts were made to prepare and implement district and even sub-district plans, with donor-supported integrated rural development projects following close behind. In South Asia, especially India, national programme followed national programme for rural development, to be administered through field bureaucracies. The pervading sense, supported by the best development wisdom of the time, was that government could and should do more.

A good illustration is the volume **Redistribution with Growth** (Chenery et al. 1974), a joint study by the Development Research Center of the World Bank and the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex. **Redistribution with Growth (RWG)** was inspired by the thinking and experience of ILO Missions, notably to Colombia (1970), Sri Lanka (1971) and Kenya (1972), and especially by Sri Lanka's outstanding achievements in health and education. It was also influenced by India's directly administered rural programmes. Significantly, Kenya, which received and influenced one of the ILO Missions, was

closer to South Asian than to most African conditions in having a strong rural administration. Not surprisingly, direct administrative action by the state in rural development was taken for granted as a major mode of intervention. If not a Bible of development in the 1970s, **RWG** was at least a revered text, cheap (my copy cost UK pounds 1.40), accessible, and much prescribed and studied, as the heavily thumbed copies in the IDS library testify.

RWG is a prospectus composed by humane economists, having a second go after the planning fantasies of the 1960s. The authors had learnt the lesson that rural elites tend to capture the benefits of government programmes. They sought solutions through targetting; there were to be rural target groups, and urban target groups. In targetting the rural poor, asset distribution through land reform was stressed, together with services specially, for small farmers, as in the statement that: 'A land reform which breaks the power of large farmers and the rural elite will...provide a framework within which public goods and services can be directed to the target groups with minimum leakage' (ibid:135).

To provide these services, new organisations were suggested – 'wholly new institutions endowed with ample resources and the best cadres' (ibid:68). An Agency for Small Farmers would conduct a coordinated programme with a package combining credit, crop extension, crop insurance, and input supplies (ibid:128–90). The faith in direct government action, and the socialist sympathies of the time, are reflected in the opportunities seen in Tanzania:

...we would stress that the lack of rigidity in much of tropical Africa makes possible interventionist policies designed to create new forms of rural institutions, such as the ujamaa villages in Tanzania, which can provide for the more efficient use of public infrastructure, agricultural capital, and such government-supplied services as extension, health care, and education' (ibid:135).

To reach and help the rural target groups, special institutions and programmes were needed. Economies, planning and the state were all seen in terms of growth. To do more for the poor, government must grow. The solution to rural poverty was not less government but more.

Neo-liberal in the 1980s: structural adjustment without a human face

If the 1970s were the decade of equity, the 1980s have been the decade of efficiency. This is not to assert how much or how little either equity or efficiency have been achieved, but to say that these have been prominent in rhetoric and ideology. Efficiency has been linked in neo-liberal prescriptions with freeing markets and slimming government. In the 1980s, especially in SSA, but perhaps excepting Botswana, state organisations have been seen as overgrown, inefficient, corrupt, and costly. The solutions advocated and introduced in structural adjustment packages have included devaluation, which raises agricultural incomes from exports, higher domestic prices for agricultural produce, derestricting food grain movement, and deregulation of prices. Government recurrent expenditure has been cut back, and parastatals shrunk or disbanded. Even among those who have opposed structural adjustment for its lack of concern for the poor – its lack of a human face – there has been a degree of acceptance that governments should do less in some respects in order to do better in others.

A classic statement of neo-liberal prescriptions is *Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: an Agenda for Action (The Berg Report)* (World Bank 1981). This sought more efficient use of scarce resources. In his Foreword, the President of the World Bank said that administrative and managerial capacity were the scarcest resources in all countries. In that context, the report suggested that African governments should examine ways in which public sector organisations could be operated more efficiently and more reliance could be placed on the private sector. In agricultural and rural development, this implied competitive private input supply and marketing, and user charges and cost recovery for services. The solution to the problems of development was not more government but less.

Contrasts and Commonalities

To polarise two schools of thought in this way is to simplify and even caricature; but it provides a basis for asking how they have been applied, what they have in common, and what they miss.

In rural development policy and its application, South Asia, especially India, contrasts with most of SSA in adhering to neo-Fabian approaches. It was, indeed, in India that some of the policies advocated in RWG originated, and where attempts to implement them have subsequently been most sustained. To my knowledge, India is alone among developing countries in its persistence with massive administered programmes targetted to individuals or households. These include the Small Farmers Development Agency (1971), Training Rural Youth for Self-Employment (1979), and the Integrated Rural Development Programme (1979), which latter continues in 1989 on a vast scale all over the country. In a neo-Fabian mode, rural development programmes in India have been standardised, subsidised, packaged and targetted. That the packages often do not fit and often miss their targets, are commonplaces of field observation; but the approaches and programmes are stable. There are several reasons for this: some programmes are protected by misleading evaluation surveys (for a perceptive critique see Dreze 1988); subsidised programmes play their part in local political patronage; the Indian Government, despite a rural population almost twice that of SSA, has had the financial and administrative means to persist with a rural development strategy in which field bureaucracies play a major part; the successes of the green revolution are seen by policy-makers as linked with the transfer of technology through agricultural extension and other services; and India has had the relative freedom from debt and aid dependence to be able to resist donor pressures to change its policies. In consequence, India's field bureaucracies show little sign of being eroded by neo-liberal thinking.

In contrast, many of the countries of SSA, with their declining economies, heavy debts, large government organisations, and weak administrations, have evoked and been subject to the neo-liberal prescriptions of structural adjustment. Both the state and the market have shrunk back. With recurrent budgets squeezed by smaller revenues and the conditions required by the IMF, World Bank and other donors, existing field bureaucracies have been starved of resources, with the familiar tragedies of agricultural extension staff without tyres for their bicycles, schools without textbooks, clinics without drugs, and teachers and health staff without pay. With economies in decline, basic goods have become scarce and costly. In places it has been NGOs, rather than the market, that have filled the vacuum left by the decline in government services. In India, the state tries to

extend its activities to help the poor individually; in much of SSA, the state struggles simply to maintain some contact with them collectively and to sustain basic services.

These contrasts conceal commonalities. The Neo-Fabian and neo-liberal prescriptions of **RWG** and of **The Berg Report** respectively have in common that both have been elaborated and propagated by economists and in association with the World Bank. The authors of **RWG** were all economists – Chenery, Ahluwalia, Bell, Duloy and Jolly (though Bell and Jolly at least had rural field experience). Berg was also an economist. It may be no coincidence that while the **Berg Report** criticised the size of government in SSA, the one part to be strengthened was planning – 'The appropriate response now is to reinforce the central planning agencies, and to endow them as quickly as possible with the investment evaluation capacities they need' (World Bank 1981:33). Both ideologies, and both sets of prescriptions, embody a planner's core, centre-outwards, top-down view of rural development. They start with economies, not people; with the macro not the micro; with the view from the office, not the view from the field. And in consequence their prescriptions tend to be uniform, standard and for universal application.

A Counter-ideology of Reversals

Centre-outwards, core-periphery views have their validity and strength; after all, since most power resides in the centre, it is in the centre that change can most readily be effected. But they also mislead unless complemented, qualified and offset by the reverse view, from the periphery. This amounts to a counter-ideology to those generated and diffused from the cores, whether Marxist, socialist, structuralist, or neo-liberal, and whether red, pink, blue, or any other hue but certain shades of green. It is a counter-ideology which takes as its starting point the conditions and priorities of rural people, especially the poorer, and the problems and opportunities which they face; and it leads to a different constellation of prescriptions.

The reversals have been elaborated elsewhere (Chambers 1983, 1987, 1988a). The switch or flip of view can be recognised by reflecting on the normal meanings attributed by professionals to the word 'remote', a word as profoundly

as it is unconsciously urban-biased in elite usage; to a villager far from town it is the town that is remote. The reversals are of location, learning, explanation, values, control, authority and power, to put first the poor and the periphery.

When related to the role of the state in rural development, reversals provide an agenda for the 1990s. They point to two key aspects: first, the changing priorities of poorer rural people; and second, the conditions and behaviour of the government field staff with whom they interact.

For any urban-based outsider to state the priorities of poor rural people is yet another core-based act of paternal guesswork. But not to attempt this is also an act by default. Any statements have to be subject to qualification and change; and one of the greatest unmet needs in rural development is a continuous, sensitive exercise to understand the conditions, strategies and priorities of the poorer. When this is undertaken (as shown by e.g. Beck 1989, Breman 1985, Corbett 1988, de Waal forthcoming, Heyer 1989, IDS 1989, Jodha 1988, Rahmato 1987), the reality revealed can differ from beliefs commonly held by outsiders. Using these and other insights from fieldwork, my best inference is that many of the aspirations of poor rural people can be captured in the concept of secure and sustainable livelihoods, with access to basic goods and services, and freedom from fear and hassle. But priorities change, and differ; as the extended family and patron-client obligations have weakened, and as costs of services for health and education have risen, so command over assets to handle contingencies and buy services have become more important; and with rapid social and political change, and with more education and better communications, so self-respect has come to matter more.

For their part, field-level government staff have similar aspirations. They are often committed to their professional work but lack resources for it. They want and often badly need to earn more. Promotion is usually out of the question. Especially in SSA, their salaries have typically declined in real terms, eroded by inflation. Quite often, they no longer provide even for a basic livelihood. In Eastern Uganda in 1987 the monthly salary of a nursing aid would buy one kilo of sugar and two loaves of bread, and it required two months' salary of a secondary school headmaster to buy a bicycle tyre (Whyte 1987:8-9).

Faced with the need and desire to increase their earnings, field-level staff who do not resign or manage to move to urban centres have two main strategies:

i. moonlighting and daylighting.

Clandestinely or openly, staff undertake economic activities. Farming and other self-employment are common. In part of Uganda in 1987 'agriculture was - for most professionals - the strategy of necessity which allowed them to remain professionals' (Ibid:12). In Burkina Faso it is known, and in Sudan it is widespread, for government field staff to be paid officially approved salary supplements by NGOs to work on the NGOs' programmes. Some activities are moonlighting - illicit and concealed; others, in countries as different as Sudan and Vietnam, are daylighting, carried out openly because they are condoned.

ii. extracting rents.

The extraction of rents takes several forms:

- a. subsidies are shared. Subsidised programmes and inputs provide a surplus which can be creamed off. In India, for example, there are standard understandings of percentages for sharing the subsidies for purchasing IRDP milch buffaloes.
- b. services are sold. Many practices are known. In much of West Africa, government rural health services have been de facto privatised. There and elsewhere, whatever small amounts of drugs are supplied are sold by staff, operating what are in effect private dispensaries. Teachers are paid by parents for admitting children. Officials are paid for moving files or providing documents. Irrigation staff are paid for providing water. Examples are legion.
- c. rents are extorted. Frequently, government rules give local-level staff powers which they can use to extract rents. Poor people are blackmailed with threats of persecution or prosecution. Payments are demanded for waiving restrictions. At the field level there are then conflicts of interest between poor people and poorly paid staff. Moreover, the less poor often pay less while the poorer pay more.

The perspectives of poor rural people, and the realities of field administration, are basic to the practical counter-ideology of reversals. This seeks to see things from the point of view of the poorer. In doing this, it is complementary to other

ideologies, not an alternative. Macro analysis will always be needed as well as micro. But when generating agenda and assessing policies, core professionals normally neglect what poor people want and need, or assume they know what it is, or treat it as a residual. A balanced view can only be gained, offsetting and correcting core-based ideologies and views, by putting first the priorities of those who are poorer and peripheral.

In thinking through what the state should and should not do in the 1990s, three approaches help. The first is to learn lessons from the failures and successes of the past two decades. The second is a stance of eclectic pluralism, open to a mix of ideas. The third is this counter view, of reversals, starting with the perspectives of the poorer. The prescriptions which follow may fit neo-liberal tendencies in saying what the state should not do, and neo-Fabian tendencies in saying what it should do; but they do not depend on either philosophy. Based on reversals, they stand on their own.

WHAT THE STATE MUST DO

(All can read this part)

Three universal functions of the state are fundamental for the rural poor. It must do the following:

i. maintain peace and the democratic rule of law

The appalling suffering and poverty resulting from civil disturbance and war is so obvious that it is easily underestimated. The fear, pain and anguish; the destruction, theft or loss of property; the insecurity of tenure; the disincentive to invest; the danger of loss of crops; the weak labour power when adults are fighting, guarding or killed; the interruptions to education; the disruption of services; the distress migration and destitution of refugees – any listing of bad effects can start with these and continue with many more. The record of the 1970s and 1980s includes Afghanistan, Angola, Burundi, Chad, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Iran, Iraq, Kampuchea, Laos, Lebanon, Mozambique, Namibia, Palestine, Rhodesia (as it was), Sri Lanka, Sudan, Tibet, Tigray, Uganda, Vietnam, West Irian and Western Sahara, without even starting on Latin America.

The democratic rule of law is also fundamental. In some radical circles in the 1970s, democracy was seen as a form of Western cultural imperialism, and 'law and order' were dirty words associated with oppressive police action. Law can indeed favour the rich and the exploiters. Where force and intimidation prevail, as in much of Bihar, the poorest suffer. Where laws give power to petty officials, they may abuse it. It is the fairly administered rule of democratic law, and accessible justice for the poor, that matter.

Colin Leys once wrote on the primacy of politics (in Seers and Joy eds. 1971). One can add the primacy of peace, and of fair laws and justice for the poor.

ii. provide basic infrastructure and services

Fiscal management of revenues and budgets is again fundamental. Beyond and based on that is the provision and maintenance of basic amenities to serve rural areas, such as trunk roads, railways, secondary and often primary schools, community and preventive health care, agricultural and veterinary extension, water supplies, weights and measures inspectorates, and in some areas telephones and electricity. Often, these are beyond the power of local communities to command and install or of the market to provide. NGOs, it is true, especially in some of the more afflicted states of SSA such as Sudan, have increasingly complemented and substituted for the state, and may do so even more in future. But the state remains the logical long-term institution to provide and maintain much of a country's basic infrastructure and services.

iii. manage the economy

Managing the economy, both externally and internally, is accepted by all except anarchists to be a legitimate and necessary function of the state, though views differ sharply on what and how much it should do. These issues are the subject of other essays, but three points relating to the rural poor can be noted.

First, the debate on pricing policy for agriculture (see Harvey 1988) has not generated simple feasible policies applicable worldwide, given the conflicts of interest between poor rural producers and poor urban consumers; but higher prices for agricultural produce have often proved powerful means of enhancing the wellbeing of most poor rural people.

Second, parastatals for production support and marketing present a spectrum of monopoly and competition, and of performance. At one extreme is inefficient, overgrown and corrupt monopoly. Some West African marketing boards in the 1960s and 1970s are one example. Another is the introduction of monopoly government organisations in some parts of India to market the minor forest products gathered by tribals. This was designed to bypass contractors who paid little. In effect, though, it merely introduced another stage in marketing with its own costs, with the result that the tribals received even less than before (pers comm. N.C.Saxena). In such conditions, it is common for field staff to gain power which they use to extract rents. Near the other end of the spectrum is the degree of democratic control and efficiency in marketing organisations achieved in Zimbabwe (Thomson 1988). The question has to be asked, case by case, whether in the real, local world, poor rural people will be better or worse off with a parastatal marketing organisation. Sometimes, but not always, the best solution may be plural, with a competitive private sector but a government agency providing a floor price.

Third, from the point of view of the rural poor, managing the economy entails much more than just ensuring growth, good prices and marketing: it also includes providing conditions with access to food and to basic goods at affordable prices, a function which some states in SSA have failed to fulfil.

AN AGENDA FOR ABSTENTION

(Neo-liberals can read this part)

The neo-liberal critique of state intervention in the economy has included the size and inefficiency of government bureaucracy and of parastatals, with prescriptions that the state should do less and the market more. A full review of the scope for limiting or reducing state intervention to make things directly better or less bad for the poor would require a book of its own. Here, some illustrations must suffice, proceeding from the more to the less obvious and recognised.

i. forced collective agriculture and villagisation

Were it not for continuing attempts to maintain collective agriculture, as in North Korea and Ethiopia, this paragraph would be unnecessary. Only, it seems, with exceptional and voluntary ideological commitment, as with some of the kibbutzim

in Israel, can producer cooperatives work at all well; and even the kibbutzim have had problems of sustainability. That the USSR, China and Vietnam have been reversing collectivisation is a recognition of the ultimate force of what most people want. That the USSR is finding the reversal difficult is an indication of the powerful inertia of vested bureaucratic interests once institutions have been established. In SSA, producer cooperatives have been more important in ideological debates than in economic reality (Hedlund 1988:12), and have performed badly; even ujamaa, the simple and limited form of collectivisation attempted in Nyerere's Tanzania, and remarked on positively in RWG, did not work.

Villagisation induced by degrees of force has often been linked with collectivisation, as in Ethiopia, North Korea and Tanzania, and as now proposed for parts of Zimbabwe. The pros and cons have been the subject of much debate. The official motives are often a desire to control a disgruntled and dispersed peasantry. Against the officially listed advantages of better access to services must be set higher health risks from population concentrations, loss of control over and protection of land, including productive micro-environments, and loss of incentives to invest in more sustainable agriculture. Most important of all, villagisation is rarely what people want.

It seems inherent in the contemporary human condition for most rural people to seek a secure and independent land-based livelihood where resources are controlled and commanded by the family and where returns are directly linked to efforts. With secure tenure and rights to land, livestock and trees, farm families tend to take the long view and invest in sustainable agriculture (Chambers 1987). Without it, they take the short view and environmental degradation often follows. Not only are collectivisation of agriculture and forced villagisation undesirable as forms of core-based, top-down, ideological and political paternalism, which puts rural people's priorities last; they are also environmentally unsound.

II. shining islands of salvation

Islands of salvation are small projects which receive special support and attention. Most governments deceive themselves and the international community through visits to these privileged entities, and through superficial reports and studies. Mick Moore cites the water cooperatives on canal irrigation in Gujarat, supposed by an international authority (Repetto 1986) to buy water

wholesale on a volumetric basis. However, almost all evidence of these cooperatives traces back to a single small project: the accessible, heavily subsidised, closely administered, and frequently visited Mohini Water Cooperative Society; and sustained searches by academic sleuths elsewhere in Gujarat have drawn an almost complete blank. The outcome is prescriptions which, as Moore shows, are physically and administratively infeasible, and worse, which distract attention from the main priorities for the poor. These are better management of canal main systems to improve supplies to the underprivileged at the tails. Or again, much of the insight and understanding about the progress and feasibility of ujamaa villages in Tanzania in the late 1960s was based on repeated visits to and articles about three special cases – the Ruvuma Development Association, Mbambara, and Upper Kitete. Generalising from these exceptional examples helped to mislead policy-makers into a disastrous decade of trying to do what poor rural people did not want.

iii. **borderline big projects**

Not all big projects in rural development are bad. Few would wish to argue that the rural poor of Egypt would have been better off if the Aswan dam had not been built. Big infrastructure is sometimes needed, and indivisible. The case for heavy investments in communications and in power can be strong. There may also be a case for some large-scale flood control works, for example in the watersheds that flow into Bangladesh.

That said, the case against big new rural development projects has strengthened. Completing current projects, and maintenance and cost-covering for those completed, are often higher priorities than new construction. Complex projects have also tended to do badly. The World Bank's frank, sober and sobering evaluation of its experience with rural development from 1965-86 found an uneven record. Area development projects did worst, especially in SSA, leading to the comment that 'That form of area development project which came to be known as "integrated rural development" (that is, a multicompetent project involving two or more agencies) performed so poorly as to raise questions about the utility of that approach in many situations' (World Bank 1988: xvi). While irrigation projects outside Africa did better, the position has changed now that many of the best sites have already been exploited. Those that remain tend to require the displacement of larger numbers of people, and they are often poor and politically impotent. The record with resettlement and compensation of

oustees (though improving under pressures from the World Bank) is so bad that big projects are still likely to mean many poor losers. And when their livelihoods are given due weight in the calculus of gains and losses, appraisals are liable to be more negative.

iv. standard packages for diverse conditions

Normal bureaucracy centralises, standardises and simplifies. In capital cities, programmes are designed for whole countries and orders issued for implementation, regardless of diverse conditions. Targets, too, are set centrally and disaggregated to regions, districts and subdistricts, where they often make no sense. Agricultural extension, at its near-worst, promotes the same package of practices in different agro-climatic zones. Health services supply the same drugs to clinics regardless of local and seasonal incidence of diseases. Such standardisation fails to serve the public, demoralises staff, and has again and again been found wanting.

v. controls which harm or exclude the poor

Many controls which make sense to central policy-makers in practice harm the rural poor. The administrative reflex is to control and regulate for the common good; but with astonishing frequency, across a wide range of countries, conditions and domains, such control and regulation hurts the poor. Some examples can make the point:

* **movement restrictions** hinder work seeking. For refugees, restrictions on movement imposed by host countries can prevent migration essential for livelihood, and weaken their bargaining power when they do move, since employers can threaten to turn them over to the police. In consequence, their employment is less secure, their wages liable to be lower, and the danger greater of not being paid at all. More generally, freedom of movement for the landless and for poor rainfed farmers can be essential to permit migration to fill in seasonal gaps in work.

* **effective nationwide price controls on scarce basic goods** hurt the rural poor. Where the controls are effective, as in Zambia in 1980, it does not pay for rural traders to stock goods since they cannot cover transport costs and risks. Goods then stay in towns. Urban people have better access, and rural black

markets, if supplied at all, have higher mark-ups (ILO/JASPA 1981). Attempts by a central government to stamp out a black market, as with basic goods like paraffin, sugar, oil, rice and flour in Darfur in Sudan in 1984, only further push up the black market prices (Diab 1988:44). The rural poor pay more or get nothing.

* **restricted movement of food crops** creates local seasonal shortages which the market cannot relieve. In Ethiopia in 1987, where such regulations prevailed, the price of sorghum at Degan market, on the main tarmac road from Addis Ababa to Assab, reportedly rose to three times its price at harvest, the highest prices being at just the time when poor people were having to eat less at fewer meals.

* **regulations for minimum distances between tubewells** in some parts of India protect the privileged access of those who sink tubes first. The restrictions do not deter the better off who have independent sources of credit: they can ignore the rules and go ahead anyway. The restrictions do exclude precisely the poorer who need institutional credit which requires that the regulations be observed. As so often, the haves have access denied to the have-nots (Tushaar Shah, pers. comm.).

* **prohibitions on cutting trees on private land, and on their transport and sale** deter planting, especially by poorer farmers who cannot handle contractors and the bureaucracy. In many countries, but on the largest scale in India, farmers are either prohibited from cutting trees on their land, or require permissions to do so. This means that even if farmers are able to cut, transport and market their trees, they get less for them. Of 12 cases reported by N.C.Saxena (Chambers, Saxena and Shah 1989) of sales of trees or tree products in India, the highest receipt by the seller was 43 per cent of the disposal price, while in eight cases it was less than 20 per cent, among which three were less than 10 per cent. Cutting and transit restrictions were a major factor in price formation. Sellers were in a weak bargaining position, having to rely on the contractors who bought their trees to make the necessary side payments to the authorities. Though intended to conserve the environment to benefit all, restrictions on cutting, transport and sale discriminate against the poorer and weaker, induce them to cut and sell while they can, and discourage them from replanting. Poor people's private trees are savings, but in these conditions they can only cash them on bad terms. To restrict harvest, transit and sale is like a bank manager refusing withdrawals; not surprisingly this inhibits deposits – tree planting – especially by

the poorer. There is probably no measure so easy, quick and vast in impact, and which would help poorer farmers and the environment more, than the abolition of such rules.

Restrictions such as these – on movement of people, on retail prices for scarce basic goods, on movements of food grains, on sinking tubes for groundwater, and on the harvest, transit and sale of private trees – are manifestations of the disabling state. Whatever their intentions, in practice such rules impoverish and deprive the rural poor – by loss of opportunities for earning; by denial of access to productive resources; by disincentives for saving; by less to buy and higher prices; and by the hassles, uncertainties and costs of dealing with rent-seeking officials or those who can pay them off. Those who are less poor and more influential can flout or bypass regulations, while the poorer are excluded, or have to pay. Not always, but all too often, restricted access and imperfect markets penalise poor rural people. Again and again, they want the state off their backs. One of the quickest and easiest ways for the state to help poor rural people on a large scale is to abolish damaging restrictions, to dismantle the disabling state.

For neo-liberals who want the state to wither more than somewhat, these points may warm the heart. They should provide an acceptable and practical agenda. But let them not relax and rejoice too soon, for there is more to come.

AN AGENDA FOR ACTION

(Neo-Fabians can read this part)

i. normal bureaucracy: doing the do-able

Since field bureaucracies normally centralise, standardise and simplify, it is commonsense to give them tasks for which these tendencies are strengths. These are of two types.

The first is where a standard receiving environment can be found or created, suitable for a standard input. Immunisation for people or livestock is an example, with simple one-off inputs into the closely controlled and predictable environment of the human or animal body. To differing degrees the GOBI (growth charts, oral rehydration, breast feeding, and immunisation) programmes promoted by UNICEF lend themselves to simple repetition, and have scored

successes in child welfare even in bad economic conditions such as those in Zimbabwe in 1982-4 (Cornia *et al.* 1987:290). Sometimes, too, uniform environments can be created, as when irrigation and fertiliser modify the farm environment to fit green revolution genotypes.

The second feasible task for normal field bureaucracies is the transfer or supply of technology which is robust and usable in a wide range of conditions. In India, the Technology Missions based in the Prime Minister's office have stressed high quality blackboards and good handpumps. Blackboards and handpumps can be designed and made to work well almost anywhere, given schools and groundwater respectively. It is again the do-able that is being done.

ii. safety nets

Almost all poor people, including many of the ultra poor or near-destitute, struggle hard, even desperately, to avoid becoming even poorer; but they are vulnerable to contingencies. When bad years and disasters strike, they are further impoverished, whether through sale of assets, new debts, new obligations, or physical disability. Big health care costs are one new threat to the poor who have a sick relative; they can impoverish utterly, reinforcing the case for effective free or cheap treatment. Once impoverished by loss of productive assets, say in a famine, recovery is hard. To help those who have become poorer to claw back to their previous condition is costly and difficult, although there have been successes, as shown by experience with OXFAM-supported restocking programmes for pastoralists in Kenya (Moris 1988). In general, though, it is likely to be much more cost effective, as well as more humane, to provide safety nets to help poor people avoid becoming poorer in the first place.

Measures to do this are many. They include: public works and food for work programmes, among which the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme provides a model in which groups of people can demand work paid at the minimum wage; early interventions to keep food prices down and incomes up at bad times, for example by buying at good prices whatever poor people decide to sell (livestock, jewellery, charcoal etc); when famine threatens, food or other relief provided early enough to prevent the poorer having to dispose of their assets, together with clean water and immunisation (de Waal 1989); and at all times, effective preventive and curative health services available free or at low

cost. Also, wherever the state has the resources and capacity, and social supports are feeble, there is a case for help for the destitute and indigent, as provided for widows in some Indian states.

The weaker the state, the greater the part NGOs can have to play: but in most countries, at most times, it is to the state that the safety net role falls.

iii. changing rules

The micro perspective, from below, can reveal scope for gains by the poorer from changing rules. Tushaar Shah's fieldwork on groundwater markets in India, coupled with economic analysis, led to a switch of electricity charging policy in Gujarat, from pro rata to graduated per horsepower rates. This resulted in between 1.5 and 2 mn buyers of irrigation water (generally the poorer and smaller farmers) paying 25 and 60 per cent less to sellers (Chambers, Saxena and Shah 1989). The question is whether this was a unique opportunity, or whether other fieldwork and analysis could reveal other simple changes with similar vast, quick impact. At the very least, micro-level investigation merits attention to search for other potentials.

iv. secure rights and information

The poorer people are, the more they need secure rights. To enjoy their rights, they need to know what they are and how to claim them. They also often need organisation and solidarity to overcome vested interests. Two aspects can illustrate the potential here.

First, where restrictions are abolished, the changes must be credibly known. In India a forester has told me that although in law no restrictions on movement of certain trees applied, the Forest Department pretended to the public that they did. A first step in the reversal of power needed in such a case is information, and then encouragement, through countervailing organisation, and even through changes in the judicial system, for people to claim their rights, resist extortion, and eliminate hassle.

Second, for resource-based livelihoods to be sustainable, rights and access to the resources must be secure. Without secure tenorial rights, groups and families lack the incentive for long-term investment in land, water, pasture, soils

and trees. In practice, it is precisely the more fragile environments – forests, uplands, swamps, wetlands, semi-arid savannahs, and arid pastures – disparate though they are ecologically, where tenure is least secure and least exclusive. Urban-based interests sometimes seek to gain or maintain open access and to deny exclusive tenurial rights to communities or individuals; and this can reinforce the common failure in central places of policy-making to recognise the importance of secure tenure to those who seek their livelihoods in such remote and ecologically vulnerable areas.

Communication of their rights to poor and scattered rural people is perhaps the most promising frontier for the state in rural development in the 1990s. In contrast with earlier decades, it will be easier to inform peripheral people about changes in regulations and rights. The revolution in communications is already reaching the most remote places. Using multiple channels – radio, television, video, newspapers, handbills, noticeboards, meetings – public information and public consultations will be more credible and convincing. It will be harder to mislead the poor at the local level. The benign state cannot be assumed, and communications can be used for many bad purposes. Where, though, there is central desire to inform and empower through credible and correct information, the means to do so will more and more be there. Communications are a cornerstone of an enabling state.

REVERSALS, DIVERSITY AND THE ENABLING STATE

The prescriptive paradigm of reversals for rural development is neither neo-Fabian nor neo-liberal. Nor is it just eclectic pluralism. Putting poor rural people first provides starting points which are at once dispersed, diverse and complicating. Linear teleology in development thinking has long since fallen from favour (for critiques see e.g. Nette 1969 and Streeten 1983:881–3) but linear measures of development along scales (per caput GNP, infant mortality rate, female literacy...) persist as universal tools of assessment and comparison. They are needed, but they condition analysts to think in linear terms. In contrast, field-level realities – whether ecosystems, farming systems, or livelihood strategies – are non-linear, adaptive and differentiating. For some professionals, development is still, consciously or unconsciously, seen as convergent; in the paradigm of reversals, development is decentralised and divergent. While

normal bureaucracy and normal markets centralise, standardise and simplify, it is in contrast by becoming more complex and diverse that ecosystems and livelihood strategies become more stable and more sustainable.

Near the core of this paradigm is decentralised process and choice. One expression of this is farmer participatory research for resource-poor agriculture (Farrington and Martin, 1988; Chambers, Pacey and Thrupp, 1989). This is coming to stress not the transfer of technology in the form of packages of practices for the uniform, simple, controlled environments of the irrigated green revolution, but provision of baskets of choices for the more diverse, complex and risk-prone farming systems of rainfed agriculture. Bureaucratic reversals are implied, with varied local requests passed up from farmers replacing pre-set technologies passed down to them. Approaches which put farmers' analysis and priorities first complement those which generate and transfer technology. In this mode, the state is not school but cafeteria, and development is decentralised, becoming not simpler but more complex, and not uniform but more diverse.

The paradigm of reversals takes us even further; for it resolves the contradiction between the neo-Fabian thesis that the state should do more, and the neo-Liberal antithesis that the state should do less. In terms of this paradigm, the state has often done those things which it ought not to have done, and has left undone those things which it ought to have done. The patterns vary and diverge. In much of SSA the state has been so weakened that it has retracted too far, and made errors of omission. In India it has extended too far, and made errors of commission. The worst mistakes have been rules and restrictions which give field-level staff power to extract rents from the weak. Here a new neo-liberal agenda can liberate the poor by abolishing the regulations used to exploit them. The task is to dismantle the disabling state. In parallel, there is more that the state can and should do. Here a new neo-Fabian agenda can decentralise while providing safety nets, secure rights and access to reliable information, and permitting and promoting more independence and choice for the poor. The task is to establish the enabling state. For both these new agendas, the unifying theme is reversals, to put first the diverse priorities of poor people. To understand and support these is equitable – helping people gain what they want, efficient – mobilising their creative energy, and sustainable – providing incentives for long-term self-reliant investments by the poor. The vision is then of a state which is not only protector and supporter, but also enabler and liberator; and of the 1990s as a decade for equity and efficiency through reversals and diversity.

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