# 1 Rural Development

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In this introduction we present an overview of rural development as an ideology and as a practice. We argue that as a practice, with some significant exceptions, it does not achieve its ostensible goals. We conclude that this failure is the result of the incompatibility both between different goals and between the goals and the means which are almost universally promoted as the ways to achieve rural development. This incompatibility is concealed by a rhetoric which asserts the mutual interests of rural development agencies, governments and rural populations *en masse*. This rhetoric of common interest obscures the reasons for failure.

By 'rural development' we understand planned change by public agencies based outside the rural areas. These agencies include national governments, acting alone, and international organisations acting in association with them. These agencies generally represent development as an impossibility without their intervention. The literature on rural development is full of statements implying that if external intervention did not take place there would be no 'development' at all (Hunter, Bunting and Bottrall, 1976a, for example). This is certainly not true. It does not take into account the remarkable expansion in the production of crops for export and for domestic markets by African producers acting on their own initiative (Hill, 1963; 1970; Berry, 1970; Coulson, in this volume, for example). However, this is not what the promoters of rural development have in mind when they urge 'development'. 'Development' is an activity of governments, not of peasants. Rural development is undertaken *for* peasants, not *by* them (Williams, in this volume).

Uma Lele, writing for the World Bank, defines rural development as: 'improving living standards of the mass of the low-income population residing in rural areas and making the process of their development self-sustaining' (Lele, 1975:20). Few people would disagree with so evidently worthy a goal: the problem is how to achieve it. There is a very substantial measure of agreement between external agencies regarding the solutions to this problem. This is expressed in a major recent World Bank policy document as follows:

> Since rural development is intended to reduce poverty, it must be clearly designed to increase production and raise productivity. Rural development recognises that improved food supplies and nutrition, together with basic services, such as health and education, not only directly improve the physical well-being and quality of life of the rural poor, but can also indirectly enhance their productivity and their ability to contribute to the national economy. It is concerned with the modernisation and monetisation of rural society, and with its transition from its traditional isolation to integration with the national economy (World Bank, 1975a: 3)..

It is assumed in the World Bank and elsewhere that increasing productivity and production for the market will (a) improve the welfare of the rural poor and (b) at the same time increase their contribution to the ‘national economy'. This contribution is evidently thought to have been restricted by their supposed 'traditional isolation'. Poverty is assumed to be the consequence of such isolation, not the consequence of the relationship of the African peasantry to the national, and international, economy. This view denies peasants their history. It ignores their contribution, past and present, to financing industrial investment and state institutions in Africa, as well as in Europe and North America. It assumes that peasants can do little for, and by, themselves.

Enhancing the contribution of the rural poor to the national economy becomes the means by which rural development is to be achieved. Thus those involved in rural development are concerned to increase agricultural production to supply urban and international markets. They are concerned to earn foreign exchange and to extract revenue to finance public, and private, consumption and investments. This is not necessarily compatible with the interests of rural producers. One certainly cannot attribute to the international and government agencies an unambiguous commitment to the rural population, especially the rural poor whose interests the agencies have publicly undertaken to support (World Bank, 1975a; ILO, 1977a). International organisations represent and work through 'governments who in most cases do not represent their peoples and certainly not the poor peasants' (Malik, 1979). International organisations and foreign governments are not simply sources of finance and personnel for rural development. They are also the agents, and sometimes the instigators, of international development policy as represented in the Lomé Convention, UNCTAD and in the discussions on the new international economic order, which cover such issues as the terms of exchange between raw materials and manufactures, the transfer of technology, lifting trade barriers, and international debts and liquidity (Williams, in this volume). Governments negotiate with governments, agencies negotiate with governments, neither negotiates with peasants.

There are clearly important differences of interest between national governments and international agencies. The terms upon which rural development projects are agreed are the subject of negotiation between them. National governments must respond to the interests of various local groups, who may seek special privileges for themselves, protection from foreign competition or an increase in government spending. These demands may conflict with the policies and requirements of international agencies (Payer, 1974). National governments and international agencies also have interests in common. They all generally want political stability, the maintenance of the international economic order, the export of commodities to supply foreign industry and overseas consumers and to earn foreign exchange, the provision of cheap food for the cities, crucial to foreign and domestic employers, and foreign earnings to repay development loans and other debts. In many countries state revenues, local and foreign investments and the expansion of the domestic market all depend on the maintenance of agricultural production for both domestic and export markets. In this volume Beckman shows how the interests of international capital and the successive governments of Ghana were served by peasant cocoa producers in the 1950s and 1960s, but he argues that these interests have now diverged.

It is not always easy to reconcile the interests of national and international agencies. Perhaps the most obvious example of conflict is over tariff and exchange rate policies. It is much harder to reconcile the interests of either of them with those of the rural population. Furthermore, the interests of the rural population are far from homogeneous. Some rural groups or classes may align themselves with the interests of governments and state officials against the rest of the rural population. Others may resist the attempts of external agencies to implement policies against their interests. Nevertheless, external development agencies consistently present rural development as an activity in the interests of all concerned (except, perhaps, middlemen) (World Bank, 1975a: 40).

It is central to the argument for redistribution with growth that growth is not necessarily opposed to more egalitarian income distribution, and that it is possible to improve the incomes of the poor without reducing the wealth and incomes of the rich (Chenery, 1974; ILO, 1972; cf. Leys, 1973; 1975; Weeks, 1975). Examples can be cited of countries where a land reform was followed by industrial expansion, such as Taiwan and South Korea, and growth was combined with increasing equality of incomes (Chenery, 1974: 280-90). In this volume Heyer argues that in Kenya high rates of growth achieved in the 1960s and early 1970s went together with the maintenance of the living standard of the majority of the poor. However, these examples cannot be generalised to the circumstances more common to underdeveloped countries where, according to a recent ILO study in Asia, capitalist development and increased agricultural production appear to have led to the impoverishment of the majority of the rural population (ILO, 1977b). This also appears to have been true in different periods for many parts of Africa (Palmer and Parsons, 1977; Roberts and Shepherd, in this volume).

The assertion that rural development serves all, or almost all, interests is a necessary myth. The open recognition of conflict threatens the whole strategy of rural development as currently pursued. It also threatens the practitioners working for governments and international agencies, many of whom are sincere in their own concerns for the poor. The need to present rural development as serving the interests of all concerned leads to the adoption of the language of 'participation' and strategies to secure the cooperation of the rural population for whom development projects are devised. The language of participation is, at best, patronising. Rural development agencies see themselves as developing, indeed 'animating', rural people who are accused of being the obstacle to their own development, or unable to grasp the benefits of development until exposed to persuasion that it is, indeed, in their interests (World Bank, 1975a: 45; Hunter, 1976b: 47; cf. Coulson and Roberts, in this volume). Where terms like ‘participation' and 'partnership' are used, it is clear that the rural population are the most subordinate of partners. The idea that rural development might be initiated by the rural population does not enter the conception of 'rural development'. Indeed, where the rural population takes an organised initiative of its own accord, its activities are distrusted by external agencies to such a degree that they are suppressed, diverted, or pre-empted. The Ruvurna Development Association in Tanzania, a strikingly successful initiative from the rural population and one of the original models for what later became the official policy of ujamaa, came to be regarded as a threat to government and was eventually banned (Coulson, in this volume). Adams (also in this volume) describes how the farmers of Jamaane in Senegal formed a peasant association and hired an agronomist, whereupon they came into conflict with the irrigation development authority upstream and its plans for them. This dilemma is recognised in the World Bank: 'The manner in which early participation is to be achieved and balanced with the need for overall guidance and control from the center, is a problem which can only be resolved within each country'(World Bank, 1975a: 37).

Participation seems to mean getting people to do what outsiders think is good for them. 'Overall guidance and control from the centre' defines the relationship between agencies of rural development and peasants. It excludes peasants' conceptions of their own development (cf. Adams, in this volume). When agencies interfere too much with the lives or goals of peasants, peasants may seek to circumvent them. Barnett, in this volume, describes how farmers on the Gezira scheme divert irrigation water from cotton fields to food crops (see also Coulson, in this volume). Such resistance leads governments and agencies to impose further controls. Wallace, in this volume, describes how failure to comply with the requirements of the Kano River irrigation scheme led officials to demand the power to exercise sanctions over recalcitrant farmers.

What, then, are the conflicts between the interests served by 'rural development' and those of peasant producers? The overwhelming majority of rural producers in tropical Africa are still peasants: they control the means of production and use family labour, increasingly supplemented by wage labour, to produce their domestic consumption needs both directly and by exchanging the products of their own labour on the market. As Williams argues in this volume, there are distinct advantages to peasant production as far as governments are concerned. Peasant production supplies food and raw materials relatively cheaply. It also provides a source of revenue which is used to develop the rest of the economy. However, peasants are also a problem because their ownership of the means of production and of subsistence gives them a degree of independence. They may be in a position to refuse to supply particular markets, or to agree to supply only on terms that are relatively favourable to them. Moreover, peasant production conflicts with the establishment of capitalist farming enterprises**.** Capitalist enterprise depends on the existence of a class of wage labourers separated from the means of production. The main source of such labour in Africa is the peasantry. Capitalist farmers also compete directly with the peasantry for land, for wage labour and other means of production.

As we have seen, one of the major means of achieving rural development is to increase production for the market and improve productivity. It is to often assumed that these processes can be grafted on to'subsistence’ production at no cost to domestic consumption or income. Methods for improving the production of staple crops, such as millet have often been neglected in favour of the commercial crops that are supposed to increase the peasants' cash income. But the latter is only an improvement if the volume and quality of domestic consumption does not suffer. It will do so unless enough land is available for both and unless more labour is available which can be deployed without any loss to subsistence production. Indeed, sometimes this problem is not considered at all. It is also too often assumed that a head of household can shift around the labour of his dependents at will. Domestic labour (the labour of men, women and children standing in specific social relationships towards one another) cannot be shifted around from one task to another. Husbands cannot always force their wives to take on extra tasks, although such tasks are sometimes done by women for wages outside the household. Nor, even though female labour in Africa has sometimes been ignored or dubbed 'unproductive', can households afford to divert women from such tasks as child-care, food processing and trading, whether such activities are the whole or only part of women's contribution to the maintenance of the household. In order to take on new activities *and* maintain subsistence consumption, households may be forced to take on more wage labour, thus increasing their costs of production.

A shift to staple crops with higher yields to labour time, such as maize or cassava, may be possible, although not necessarily desirable. The maintenance of local markets in staples might also improve levels of consumption in the rural areas. Production for local rural markets can be important sources of increasedincome and higher standards of living through specialisation and exchange, as they were in many areas in pre colonial times. Yet the decline of local market production has often been encouraged. The procedure of classifying all production passing through local markets as subsistence production, for national statistical purposes, is common in African countries and indicative of the disdain in which thew local markets are held. The tendency is to run down production for local markets in the process of encouraging production for urban and international markets. This tendency has been a major factor responsible for severe food shortages and famine in several African countries in the 1970s. Decline in local and regional markets, a process often originating during the colonial period, has been the cause of famine in food-deficit areas (Shepherd and Heyer, in this volume). Moreover, the discouragement of local trade in favour of urban markets and contralised marketing boards has been to the disadvantage of many peasant producers to whom trading represents an important part-time activity and additional source of income (Heyer, in this volume, referring to Cowen, 1979).

Since the 1930s, governments have both initiated cooperatives and incorporated them into centralised state marketing systems. Originally these were intended mainly for export crops, but increasingly governments have intervened in internal food marketing. lley have bypassed local market systems, have required farmers to grow crops for, and preferred in, urban markets in order to move food out of the rural areas and have created lucrative black markets for favoured traders (Harriss,1979; Adams. in this volume).

Peasants are forced to sell to the market in order to earn cash which is required, in increasing quantities, to provide for the necessities of life and to pay taxes (Bernstein,1978; Cowen and Roberts in this volume). They may be able to enter the market on relatively favourable terms under certain conditions. Tlese are when new markets become available for relatively high-value export or industrial crops, such as cocoa or tobacco, and when taxation on such commodities does not amount to a disincentive. Such conditions also exist when peasants can produce a variety of crops for which there h a market and therefore respond to price advantages, or where there are alternative markets for their products. For example, groundnut producers in Nigeria have been able to avoid the low prices offered by the marketing boards by selling on the domestic market (Hogendorn, 1970). It is this option which governments in a number of countries have sought to exclude by creating state marketing monopolies (Coulson and Heyer, in this volume). Producers of export crops have held up sales to foreign companies and marketing boards as in Ghana in the 1930s (United Kingdom, 1938), or more recently in Senegal, but such hold-ups are difficult to organise and sustain.

In order to benefit from cheap peasant production, governments and foreign companies need to control the conditions under which peasants sell, or even produce, their crops. lle problem is, however, that they do not control directly the land or labour-power of the peasants (Williams, in this volume). Rural development projects provide one means of soliciting or forcing peasants to conform to the requirements of outsiders. Barnett (1977 and in this volume) shows how the control of irrigated land on the Getra scheme is used to force peasants to produce cotton, rather than food for consumption and sale. This 'transformation' approach, in the form of large-scale settlement, irrigation and outgrower schemes, involves direct control of peasant production by external agencies. Nearly all transformation programmes involve large-scale capital expenditure whether on machinery and equipment or on irrigation, land improvement or infrastructure. Producers accept a high degree of control over their farming systems including the timing of operations, the quality of operations, the use of purchased inputs and the choice of sales outlets and payment systems. The whole package must be attractive enough to start with to get participation, but once a producer is committed there is a substantial loss of independence, and the benefits of the whole package may become less and less favourable to him.

The experience with large-scale irrigation and settlement schemes in tropical Africa has generally been very poor, particularly with regard to production. Apart from the Gezira, most large schemes have failed to meet even basic production goals, let alone any of the other goals of the agencies or the rural population. Several simply collapsed, most notoriously the Tanzanian groundnut schemes and the Niger Agricultural Project (Wood, 1950; Frankel, 1950; Baldwin, 1957). Very similar programmes, however, are still being implemented (Wallace, 1979, and in this volume). It is frequently the case that the high investment and administrative costs of irrigation and settlement schemes, as well as of other forms of intervention, have had the effect of making peasant production more expensive without bringing significant improvements in the peasants' standard of living (Wallace, Coulson, Heyer, in this volume). The recently developed outgrower schemes seem more likely to be successful in production terms. In these, international companies with 'nucleus estates' control the production of plantation crops on small rural holdings under conditions which come near to relegating rural producers to the position of wage labourers (Marcussen and Torp, 1978; cf. Cowen, Heyer, Williams, in this volume).

As an alternative to direct coercion, rural development programmes may offer a package of inputs and welfare services in order to solicit increased production. These include rural water supplies, improved housing, health services, nutrition and child-care advice and even programmes to 'integrate' women into development (World Bank, 1975a,b,d,e; Lele, 1975: 20; Coulson in this volume; Palmer, 1979; cf. Roberts, 1979). Inputs include the new technologies which are heavily reliant upon seed, chemical fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides and even tractor services and hired labour, all of which must be purchased or obtained on credit. The whole package induces peasants to rely more heavily on the market both for their means of subsistence and for their means of production and to become increasingly dependent upon bureaucracy for supplies and serices despite the inefficiency of the bureaucracy and the vagaries in the supply and transport of foreign manufactures, leading among other things to further opportunities for the development of black markets.

It is an important part of the external agencies' concept of rural development that they believe that peasants are more or less rational and efficient within their traditional environment, which is seen as static, but when faced with new opportunities are conservative, traditionalist and unable to respond rationally (World Bank, 1975a: 12, 45). This is of course ridiculous and it ignores all the evidence of peasant innovations in crops and production methods (Forrest, Coulson, in this volume). Such a view reflects a refusal to recognise that only too often the imported technology offered to peasants has been useless, and sometimes positively detrimental (Coulson, in this volume). Peasants are more competent in their physical and social. environment than most experts. They may experiment with and exchange information about new techniques and then reject them. New techniques may be rejected because they fail to increase yields, or only increase yields at the cost of increased labour which peasants cannot provide or buy, or because equipment falls apart. New techniques may also be accepted, but used for purposes which were not intended (Roberts, in this volume). It almost seems to be the belief of the external agencies that innovations offered to peasant producers are intrinsically viable because of their non-peasant origin and the stamp of official approval attached to them. This belief contributes to the common description of rejection as irrational 'resistance to change'. .

Peasants are also assumed to be incapable of running the institutions appropriate to a 'modern' economy. 'Rural development' therefore involves the improvement of old institutions, the creation of new ones and provision for training and a career structure for personnel. Such training includes instruction as to how to communicate with rural people in order to convince them that what is being proposed is in their interest, and getting across information about new and superior ways of doing things. Institutions are supposed to ensure that means of production and credit are available at the right times and that marketing channels operate smoothly and efficiently. Thus, we find the familiar proliferation and expansion of extension services, farmer training programmes, credit institutions, marketing and distribution agencies that have so often come to be what rural development seems to be about.

The state and other centralised public agencies play the major role in organising and controlling the development of the new and expanded institutions, both because it is argued that this will make them more efficient in achieving basic production goals and, more recently, because it is argued that the poorest 40 per cent of the rural population will be better catered for this way. Public provision or supervision of institutional development is presented as the most effezdve, and also the only, way of ensuring that the worst ills of private capital or of 'local' control are prevented (World Bank, 1975a: 37). It may be true that local control will always operate in favour of one group, usually the relatively better-off. It is wrong to assume, however, that public provision has a superior record, as experience with cooperatives, credit institutions and services in tropical Africa show.

Perceptions of peasant communities as traditional and egalitarian, 'intact social structures' (World Bank, 1975a: 42; Forrest, in this volume) have justified the introduction of cooperatives, extension services and the public provision of credit, on the assumption that these benefits will be spread throughout the community (King, Roberts and Williams, in this volume). Public involvement in rural institutions has, in most cases, considerably extended economic differentiation and political inequality (Van Velsen, 1973; Williams, 1976). The institutions available for carrying out rural development are incapable of redistributing resources so that they improve the lives of the rural poor even if they do, at times. hold back the enterprise of rural traders and wealthier peasants (Coulson, Cowen and Williams, in this volume). This is now widely accepted in studies of the 'green revolution' in Asia and Latin America (Hewitt de Alcantara, 1976: 118-36, 306-22; Griffin, 1974: 46-82; 207-9, 232; Pearse, 1977). It is not yet as widely accepted in the context of rural development in Africa.

The record of cooperatives, extension services and the public provision of credit in African rural development programmes has been dismal. There are cooperatives in which all initiative is stifled by heavy-handed control from above; credit institutions that are hopelessly centralised and inefficient; marketing boards creating bureaucracies far beyond those required for their stated purposes (Tanzania, 1966; King, in this volume). The proliferation of bureaucratic structures associated with rural development appears at first sight excessive. But it may have a rationale. It may be necessary to develop extensive communications systems because one is trying to persuade rural people to do what is essentially against their own interests. It may be necessary to develop state involvement in rural development to maintain control over rural populations who see that their interests are not likely to be served by current development policies. Excessive bureaucracy may also be necessary to ensure market participation on terms favourable to external agencies. Marketing boards have been justified in that they ensure that revenue is appropriated from the rural population (Helleiner, 1966: 152-84). But there is little to suggest that this is in fact how these excessive bureaucracies and their activities can be explained (Coulson, in this volume). It may equally well be simply that the state finds them useful generators of patronage and employment (King, in this volume).

We come finally to the question of evaluation. There appears to be little foundation for the assumption that the activities of rural development programmes lead to the improvement of the welfare of the rural population, let alone the rural poor. Evaluation methods, such as social cost-benefit analysis, purport to quantify the net costs and benefits consequent on the particular forms of intervention. As Stewart has pointed out, 'net discounted rates of return' ignore the fact that costs are usually incurred by some people, and benefits by others (Stewart, 1975). Peasants, particularly the poorer peasants, are not usually among the beneficiaries.

Most programmes are undertaken with totally inadequate knowledge of such fundamental facts as population, land and income distributions, the ranges of crop yields, the levels of consumption and the quantities of marketed output at the start of or during the implementation of the programme. Consequently, these are often 'estimated', as an inspection of World Bank evaluation reports shows (e.g. World Bank, 1977a and b). Average yields before the programme are underestimated so that 'improvements' tan be claimed as the product of the inputs provided by rural development agencies (Raynaut, 1975: 36). Average yields afterthe impactof the programme has been felt are like, wise overestimated. Agencies take all the credit for increases in output, but attribute any decrease to other factors. It is very difficult to measure the net impact on output, let alone welfare, of the services provided, and it is impossible to quantify the long-term effects (Barnett and Coulson, in this volume). What often gets measured is simply the volume of inputs: their effectiveness is then assumed. Success has been defined in terms such as the number of farmers to whom credit has been disbursed, or the quantity of fertiliser which has been distributed, regardless of whether these can be shown to have led to increases in. output. Evaluation is essentially no more than an exercise in the validation of rural development. This is not necessarily the result of hypocrisy or dishonesty on the part of those involved. The distance between the ultimate goals of rural development and the means to such ends is very great. It is the means more often than the ends which are the object of evaluation. The primary goals of a programme may be completely forgotten.

Despite these problems with evaluation, evident failures are diagnosed: both failures to meet the goals to the desired extent and failures to move in the direction of the goals at all. The explanations of failure that are provided are worth considering. Failure is often seen as the result of problems *within* rural societies rather than the result of the relationship between rural societies and the external 'partners' in rural development. Conservatism or traditionalism on the part of peasants or peasant societies are common scapegoats. Anthropologists are brought in to examine local factors such as control over labour within the household, or political authority at village level. Local level explanations accumulate. They tend to consist of little more than a body of anecdotes incapable of explaining the general problem of rural development, or even of explaining with any conviction the particular problems of the local situations to which they are addressed.

Alternatively, failure is attributed to'delivery systems'or implementation machinery. These are castigated as incompetent, inefficient or uncoordinated, and solutions are sought in improving the efficiency with which they operate and coordinating the different institutions involved (Williams, 1975). The frequency of failure has led to much public breast-beating, further investment in research and evaluation, and revisions of strategy. However, the frequency of failure has not yet led anyone to abandon or even suggest abandoning rural development as currently conceived. The analyses of failure do not permit the conclusion that there is anything intrinsically wrong with the methodology of rural development.

There is no single explanation of the failure of rural development projects, or of the success of some of them. We have argued that rural development encompasses multiple, and often contradictory, interests. Some of these may be satisfied at the cost of others. The Gezira scheme did succeed in producing large volumes of cotton for the Lancashire textile industry, and more recently for export to China and other countries. It did so at the cost of preventing peasants from expanding food production for the internal market (Barnett, 1977, and in this volume). On the other hand, many projects have not even succeeded in meeting their primary goals such as improving agricultural productivity and expanding production for the market, which are held to be the key to improving the welfare of the rural population.

In most countries it now appears as if the promotion of 'rural development' has affected the course of events relatively little. It has been one of the less significant aspects of the international economic processes generated by the expansion of capitalism, which necessarily change systems of peasant production. It has proved possible for peasants to expand their production of export crops and increase the output of food for the market, as in Ghana and Nigeria in the early decades of the twentieth century, without the intervention of rural development agencies. What was required at that time was the provision of cheap shipping, railways and roads which gave producers access to new and expanded markets. In this volume, Heyer and Cowen show a similar expansion of agricultural production for urban and foreign markets which took place in Kenya in the 1960s and 1970s, to the benefit ofthe majority of the population. This appears to have followed from extensive public intervention in rural production and marketing. However, what may have been equally important was the renewed availability of land and the opening up to African producers of new markets.

How then do we explain rural development if it makes little contribution to achieving its declared objectives, or even hinders their realisation?

In the first place, rural development projects do benefit groups other than those whom they are supposed to serve. They are now big business, providing markets, contracts, consultancies and employment to fertiliser manufacturers, construction firms, goverrunent officials, international experts and academics. Secondly, they extend the patronage, authority and control of governments over rural people and may also make it easier to tax peasant production. On the other hand, government interventions may provoke rural people into resisting government authority and attacking public officials (Williams, 1976; Coulson, in this volume).

Thirdly, rural development agencies may simply lack the knowledge and experience to achieve the goals they set. Their conception of the problems may prevent them from acknowledging this. Peasant producers are usually more knowledgeable than officials and experts about local production conditions. Moreover, unlike consultants for international agencies, peasants have to bear the consequences of error and will necessarily be more thorough in their assessment of the advantages of new technologies under the conditions in which they are provided. New technologies developed outside the rural areas may increase agricultural production and benefit peasants. It is not clear that the costly apparatus of rural extension services or integrated rural development programmes is necessary to get peasants to adopt methods of production which will benefit them.

Rural development agencies are constrained by the institutions through which they work and the social systems in which they operate. These institutions are probably unable to provide services cheaply and effectively to the rural poor, or to redirect benefits away from the better off to the 'poorest 40 per cent', let alone identify the needs and productive potential of poor people. They are unable to do this partly because the interests of those who control them conflict with the interests of the rural poor. There is also the problem that the institutions are inappropriate to serve the needs of large numbers of rural poor even if this were in the interests of those who controlled them.

Rural development programmes in all their forms share a multiplicity of objectives, some more clearly defined and definable than others, which are variously in line with, or in conflict with, the interests of different groups. It may therefore be that, at the most general level, persistent failure is the result of the contradictions inherent in their activities and the impossibility of reconciling, let alone containing, them. It is important for those whose interests are not currently served in rural development that the contradictions be recognised. For the others, there is a considerable amount to be gained by obscuring them.

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