

THE FUTURE OF OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE TO RURAL ASIA

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INTRODUCTION

THROUGHOUT Asia, a fundamental change is underway in what rural societies *are*, what life in rural societies means, what relationships of rural societies to nations-at-large signify, and what rural societies are *becoming*. Within these broader transformations, traditional distinctions and meanings that have served so long to maintain the unique identities of rural societies are losing their legitimacy [65]. The question—What is rural society in Asia? What should Asia's rural society be? Does rural society in Asia have a future?—are real.

Such issues constitute a very broad agenda. An important role in addressing this agenda will be played by official development assistance (ODA). The issue that looms ever larger is what the nature of this role should actually be. Official development assistance to rural Asia stands at a crossroads. Can the ODA community confront the possibility that very different strategies may be needed in the future? Can the ODA community avoid the pitfalls of oversimplifications in understanding what its role should and can be?

I. DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE AND ASIA'S RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Official development assistance has played a pivotal role in Asia's economic development. Between 1970 and 1981, multilateral and bilateral official development assistance sources lent and granted over 68 billion dollars to Asia. Significant portions of this have gone to agriculture and rural development.¹ For example, from 1967 to 1980, Asian Development Bank lending for agriculture approached 2.3 billion dollars. From 1947 to 1981, World Bank lending to Asia for agriculture exceeded 10 billion dollars. During the 1980s, annual ODA receipts by South Asia have averaged close to 3.5 billion dollars; by Southeast Asia, close

In the course of preparing this paper, I have benefited from conversations with numerous people in the development assistance community and governments in Asia and with Gelia Castillo, Roger Ernst, John Hawkins, Lim Tek Ghee, Norton Ginsburg, Charles Morrison, Seiji Naya, Harry Oshima, and T. V. Sathyamurthy.

¹ ODA commitment to rural development historically has been focused on, but not limited to, agriculture. Examples include projects on rural roads, communications and energy, physical improvements for rural markets, rural industry, education, and so on. These types of projects often are not explicitly identified as "rural."

to 2.0 billion dollars. Agriculture and rural development continue to receive significant portions of this assistance.

Since the early 1960s, overall production of major food grains in Asia has increased dramatically. For example, rice productivity in South Asia increased from 1,500 kilograms per hectare in 1965 to over 2,500 in 1985. In Southeast Asia, average yields increased from close to 1,600 kilograms per hectare in 1965 to almost 3,000 in 1985. This growth is a result primarily of technological innovation represented by higher-yielding varieties, infrastructure improvement represented by significant investments in roads and irrigation, and more intensive cultivation represented by double cropping on newly irrigated fields and the opening of new agricultural areas. Asia's perpetual grain importers, from India to Indonesia, are becoming consistent producers of surpluses. The development assistance community—as a source of capital, expertise, and ideas—can therefore take pride in much of what has been accomplished in Asian agricultural and rural development during the last thirty years.

Within the development assistance community, issues of poverty, low productivity, and unemployment in rural Asia are still acknowledged,² but there is a distinct aura of confidence surrounding discussions of rural Asia. This is a confidence, borne of the “green revolution” in grain production, that many basic constraints historically limiting small-farm agricultural productivity have been eased, that agricultural development can now play a more positive role in meeting many of the employment and income requirements of rural Asia (provided that governments do not interfere with market forces) and that urbanization will address most of the remaining needs.

While such confidence is not entirely unjustified, it is a confidence that may be constructed on too shallow a foundation. There are two related reasons. First, maintaining the productivity gains of the last twenty years and sustaining needed future growth rates will not be easy. There is a belief in some quarters of the ODA community that is tantamount to saying that an improvement in agricultural productivity is an irreversible gain. It is not. Second, Asia's rural development is involving considerably more than increasing small-farm agricultural productivity. True enough, there are many rural areas in Asia where little else goes on other than small-farm agriculture, but these areas are becoming less common [54] [82].

In parts of South and Southeast Asia, per capita food production has grown only marginally, grain yields are showing evidence of levelling,³ and areas devoted

² This is especially true for assessments of Indonesia, the Philippines, and parts of South Asia. See, for example, [112] [113] [114].

³ Agricultural scientists and extension personnel throughout South and Southeast Asia are reporting problems of wheat and rice yield decline. Since 1983, growth for per capita food production in South and Southeast Asia have stagnated [109, pp. 35–50]. The Nepal case has been well-documented, perhaps because while estimated rice productivity (per unit area) for Nepal in 1950 was among the highest for South Asia, by 1980 it was among the lowest—despite large capital inputs into commercial agriculture [8] [13]. In some cases, drops (and rises) in agricultural production are political or statistical artifacts. For example, an extensive reevaluation is currently underway in the Philippines where the National Census and Statistics Office is reassessing a wide range of national statistics,

to nonfood agriculture have increased, sometimes with adverse impacts on local food security. Growth in agricultural production has not always been accompanied by improvements in rural welfare and in some cases there is evidence that specific patterns of agricultural development in South and Southeast Asia have been associated with deteriorating rural welfare conditions [38] [42] [56] [77] [93] [101]. A variety of factors, ranging from environmental degradation and urban expansion to economic mismanagement, civil disorder, and political interference have been associated with declines in prime agricultural areas actually harvested with food crops. Additional factors, including rural unemployment and population growth, have been associated with increases in marginal areas being utilized for food production. Food policies have had a mixed record and in many cases, may have even resulted in suppressing both agricultural incomes and productivity without noticeably improving overall nutrition levels [29] [51] [110].

Nevertheless, there is a strong sense of accomplishment permeating ODA discussions of rural Asia and this leads to a question: does Asia's rural development performance imply that the need for development assistance to rural Asia essentially has diminished or that what is needed from development assistance is becoming more complex and diverse? The question is not academic. The 1980s have witnessed the onset of "development fatigue," declining commitment to development assistance among donor governments resulting from domestic budget pressures, reactions to the third world's external debt management problem, disappointments with poor utilization of development assistance funds, and strong interest, led by the United States, in enhancing the role of the private sector both as sources and receivers of development investment. However, can private transnational investment replace ODA as a source of capital for agricultural and rural development in Asia?

Private transnational investment flows to Asia have increased to almost match net ODA flows [40]. By 1983-84, private flows as a percentage of total net capital flows was only 5 per cent in South Asia, but among the ASEAN four (Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, and Malaysia), it was at 45 per cent, while among the NICs (Taiwan, Korea, Hong Kong, and Singapore) it was close to 80 per cent. Significant portions of the private flow focus on resource development in rural areas, principally energy, mineral, and export agriculture. However, there is little evidence of substantial private investment (or private investor interest) in small-farm agriculture, rural infrastructure, community development, and other traditional components of Asia's agricultural and rural development agenda. Therefore, while it is clear that ODA will continue to have an important future in rural Asia, what is unclear is the shape of that future.

including agricultural productivity estimates. Because these estimates were based on samples drawn from farmers participating in the government's rice support program, a program that favored better-endowed rice producers and a program that experienced declining participation beginning in the late 1970s, there are reasons to believe Philippine production estimates may have been inflated.

II. ASIA'S RURAL TRANSFORMATION

The rural development challenge increasingly looming in Asia is not agricultural or agrarian alone, but rather a much more complex, dynamic, and potentially volatile process of diversification and change. The broader dimensions of Asia's rural transformation include the relationships of socioeconomic change in rural areas with processes of urbanization and industrialization. However, Asia's rural transformation also reflects other relationships and processes which are both distinct and significant.⁴ Examples include (1) the increasing importance of international trade in rural natural and human resources for national economic development; (2) the increasing importance of non-rural and nonagricultural economic power in rural economic life; and (3) the increasing complexities, capacities, and ambitions of contemporary national administration, communication, and political systems.

These examples reflect a significant longer-term characteristic of rural transformation in Asia: the transformation process is uneven in terms of which individuals, groups, institutions are affected, when, and how. Rural transformation has involved two processes that historically have not always worked in tandem. On a scale internal to rural society, transformation can be an *evolution* of the structure, composition, and functions of traditional rural social, political, and economic institutions. Interactions of population growth and agrarian organization are an example. On a scale that is broader and, in a sense, external to rural society, transformation can be characterized as the *imposition* of relationships, structures, and processes that can significantly modify and ultimately displace existing patterns of rural resource management, economic development, social mobility, and political determination. However, where the unevenness of Asia's rural transformation becomes subtle is in the coexistence, but not necessarily the correlation, of numerous transformations. Consequently, equating rural transformation with only one process, which is done when transformation is described purely as a non-market to market transition, or an agriculture to industry transition, discounts many other processes that are also occurring, such as political assimilation and mobilization; social differentiation and integration; and cultural innovation, revitalization, and suppression.⁵

To better understand Asia's rural transformation, two major concerns about rural development in Asia are briefly reviewed: rural organizational development and rural employment.

A. Governance, Participation, and Rural Organization

Local organizational resources—organizational resources that exist and can be

⁴ The utility of rural-urban distinctions is becoming a major issue in contemporary development studies. A primary position in support of the distinction is Michael Lipton's urban bias thesis [70] [75]. Examples of criticisms of the urban bias thesis include [21] [39] [47] [48] [63].

⁵ Oversimplification and reductionism have hampered comprehension of transformation processes. For a provocative critique of this tendency see [43].

mobilized on approximately a community scale—are receiving considerable attention from the development assistance community. From the Philippines' *Zanjera* to Nepal's *Moeya* to Bali's *Subak*, indigenous irrigation associations, primary examples of locally organized resource management, are being "discovered" [27]. Several strategies are being advocated to enhance the growth and participation of local organizational resources in the management and governance of local, natural, rural resources, most notably biomass and water. In the context of Asia's rural transformation, at least two important issues arise.

The first issue is the question: *who governs* [7] [68] [28]? This question becomes important to the extent that enhancing the governance roles of local organizations represents challenges to interests that pursue and maintain their own governance claims through manipulation of the policy management and institutional support system. The challenges do not always materialize. During the 1950s and 1960s, community development in South and parts of Southeast Asia "gave" rural communities a chance to provide certain amenities for themselves, but in most cases, there was no intent that rural communities (individually or as a group) were empowered to alter (favorably) any fundamental characteristics of their relationships with the state. Community organization strategies have attracted considerable new interest in recent years, but these strategies still appear to be unfolding within terms of reference that do not represent significant departures from basic relationships between the state and the rural periphery [14] [25] [41] [67] [81]. Illustrative are the moves towards decentralization in Bangladesh and Nepal promulgated at about the same time as decisions that strengthen the state's role in economic and political development and the co-evolution in Korea of a "New Community" program with growing state participation in managing the economy.

This leads to a second issue, namely, what is the status of local organizational resources as rural resources? This issue is really the question: *what is governed?* "Old" rural organizational resources (such as the social organization of labor reciprocity, the household as a foundation of the division of labor, culturally or ethnically based property management regimes) may be replaced by "new" ones (such as tenant or farm worker unions, local chapters of national political groupings, the privatization of natural resource management). Complex relationships between old and new organizational resources and other rural resources can result. What are the implications for the meanings of "local participation" and "local leadership?" What are the consequences for the viability of local governance strategies?

For example, considerable interest is being shown by rural development specialists in the development assistance community in common property resource management systems. These are indigenous systems for managing and using natural resources involving the regulation of individual resource utilization patterns by collective norms and procedures. For instance, some communities in Nepal are reported to have established rules for cutting firewood and fodder and for harvesting fruits, timber, and other products. These rules specify both individual and group rights to use the same piece of land. Communal irrigation is another example. Throughout Asia, irrigation schemes have been designed, organized,

and maintained for centuries by local populations. In many cases, they involve community organizations responsible for watching over the water rights of farmers participating in the scheme, allocating and possibly enforcing work obligations, and arbitrating any disputes that may arise. Local irrigation systems, like community forestry activities, provide an attractive existing alternative for organizing agricultural development. What is attractive about these systems is that they may represent indigenously organized (rather than externally imposed) cases of sustainable natural resource management. However, recognizing that such systems exist has led to an idealization of the strategies, an idealization that might be very inappropriate.

Social forestry and other common property resource management arrangements need to be assessed in the context of the types of demographic, social, economic, and ecologic pressures operating in Asia's more "fragile" rural environments [12] [94]. Common property management cannot always be best understood primarily as a strategy for maintaining (or achieving) important stewardship relationships between Asian rural households and their natural environments. There will be times when common property resource management is better understood as a strategy to ration access to some natural resources, not necessarily in the interests of environmental welfare, but as a tactic for consolidating the state's role in more marginal areas. In the political economy of rural Asia, limiting access to selected natural resources can be a strategy for linking state power to the "rent-seeking" behavior of rural (and often urban) elites. There are also reasons to suspect that the viability of common property management regimes will be quite sensitive to a variety of local factors such as population pressure, employment opportunities, and food security status.

These issues are important not only for what they may imply about the capabilities of indigenous rural organizations to assume "governing" roles in the management of rural natural resources. Questions about "who governs" and "what is governed" must be placed very firmly against the background of a transformation in rural politics throughout Asia [76] [79] [80] [92] [99] [102] [111]. The significance of agriculture in the national economies of virtually all countries in the region is declining. This has important consequences for the organization and significance of rural politics: the decline of agrarian-based politics (possibly to be replaced by class-based politics), efforts to "revive" agrarian politics (through steps varying from religious and cultural fundamentalism to collective organization and violence), and the cooptation of agrarian political symbols as a strategy to manipulate rural politics for national purposes.

The processes here are not uniform but in many places what can be seen is rural support of national coalitions being replaced by national control of rural coalitions. Important illustrations include: (1) the changing functions of many of Asia's political parties, from aggregating and projecting specific interests (often rural and ethnic) to centers of national power of mobilizing and reshaping those interests in support of national power—as can be seen, for example, in the recent political history of Bangladesh, China, Indonesia, and the Philippines; (2) the changing distributive dimensions of national political arenas, shifting from con-

firming locally based claims of power and privilege to rewarding acknowledgment of centrally based claims—a shift that can redefine the significance of political opposition [52] [88] [97] [106] as can be seen, for example, in Malaysia and the Philippines; and (3) the changing relationships between class formation and the evolving roles of the state, with rural–urban distinctions as bases of political organization being replaced by class-oriented foundations [18] [22] [24] [35] [50] [55] [74] [103].

Conversely, in some cases, rural and agricultural interests still appear able to effectively project and promote certain apparently rural and agricultural interests in national political arenas (e.g., Japan's domestic rice subsidies, exemptions from land reform given landowners growing export crops in the Philippines, subsidization of agricultural input costs in most countries). If these are cases of "survival," how and why have they happened [26]? Are they likely to continue? Are these, in fact, examples of the persistence of traditional rural and agrarian politics or indications of the decline or "capture" of that politics?

An interesting illustration of these complex consequences in motion is the events surrounding the construction and management of the New Tokyo International Airport at Narita. The new airport, presented as a symbol of Japan's postwar rehabilitation and global industrial ascendancy, provoked a domestic political reaction that challenged the scope of the state's role in economic development. This reaction began with a comparatively narrow appeal to environmental values at the Narita site, but expanded to a much more broadly based manipulation of values associated with an older agrarian order [4]. In other cases, some sections of traditional agricultural and agrarian interests (often larger landowners and export crop producers and millers) remain dominant, even though the social and economic context in which politics functions is less and less agricultural and agrarian. In such circumstances, what is the future of rural politics? Of politics based on distinctly rural interests? What are the implications of these types of changes for rural development strategies that assume rural communities and organizations are socially and politically viable units?

B. *The Future of Rural Work*

The supply of labor is still outpacing the demand in many parts of rural Asia. Simultaneously, in many places, the sustainable resource base is declining. The importance, therefore, of diversifying rural employment and increasing labor productivity and income in rural Asia is high [6]. However, rural employment problems are still visualized by the development assistance community in fundamentally agrarian terms: labor absorption *within* agriculture, population growth in relation to land productivity creating "surplus" labor, and off-farm employment *supplementing* a fundamentally agricultural income base. These visions of rural employment problems have led to concerns about technological displacement of agricultural labor and small cultivators, the seasonality of agricultural labor demand, the possibilities of "smoothing" agricultural labor demand through agricultural intensification, and a variety of processes, most notably migration, attracting "excess" rural labor.

These concerns are all important, but the question that needs to be asked more frequently is: would "success" in addressing problems of agrarian employment in Asia also be enough to address problems of rural employment? Can either primary or secondary urbanization productively absorb an adequate proportion of the growing rural labor force? Based on interpretations of economic development experiences in Japan, Korea, and Taiwan [83], a conclusion is frequently drawn that the most important transition occurring in the structure of Asia's rural employment is a shift from an agrarian to a non-agrarian base. Analysis of this shift has led to the proposition that agricultural development, by increasing farm incomes, creates favorable conditions for the expansion of productive nonagricultural rural employment and the reduction of rural income inequalities.

However, this proposition may be of only limited relevance for the rest of Asia. There, high rural population pressures on agricultural resources, patterns of agrarian organization and change frequently associated with the perseverance of rural poverty and inequality, evidence of *lower* average rural labor productivity outside agriculture, and indications that as much as half the rural labor force *already* seeks some income from off-farm sources are all interacting in dynamics that appear to be quite different from descriptions of East Asia's experience. For example, rural income inequality in the Philippines did not decline despite fairly rapid agricultural growth during the 1970s.

With highly unequal asset distribution in the Philippines and low labor absorption in industry due to a capital-intensive bias in industrialization policy, it is unlikely that economic growth alone will bring about necessary structural changes. In fact, it is more probable that the benefits of growth will accrue to those who own or control productive assets, and in periods of rapid economic growth, this would lead to increased inequality. Although a land reform program was begun, its coverage was limited and did not affect the extent of aggregate inequality significantly. [89, p. 11]

Nevertheless, there is little question that a shift in the composition of rural employment is occurring. Direct evidence on these matters is remarkably scant and indirect. Most of what is known, particularly in South and Southeast Asia, comes from income and expenditure surveys. These reveal that large proportions (e.g., over 40 per cent in the Philippines and Thailand) of farm household income are being attributed to off-farm sources. However, these surveys tend to concentrate on households that are engaged in agricultural activities. If other households were appropriately sampled, it is possible that the proportions of total rural household income coming from non-farm sources would be very substantial.⁶

At one level, what this suggests is that an increasing proportion of rural labor relations are not connected directly with traditional agrarian processes, but rather

⁶ "Measurement of rural nonfarm employment is also made difficult by the continually changing patterns of employment over the agricultural cycle. Estimates of labor force by economic activity generally provide a classification of workers at a single point in time according to their principal sector of employment or occupation. They are, therefore, likely to underestimate the extent of nonfarm work in rural areas, which is commonly a secondary source of income on a part-time or seasonal basis" [2, p. 228].

with more complex socioeconomic relationships in which agrarian processes may be only one part. However, a deeper implication is that employment generation, enterprise formation and expansion, skill acquisition, and occupational choice and mobility are occurring in a socioeconomic context that is essentially discontinuous with the existing work experiences of large portions of the rural population.⁷

III. THE FUTURE OF DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

Development assistance has played a very large role in Asia's rural development experience. However, points of leverage for developmental rural change in the future may no longer be primarily where development assistance has traditionally (and often successfully) looked, agricultural infrastructure and the like, but rather in the broader policy and institutional environment affecting (1) relationships between the rural economy and the national economy, and (2) relationships between the state and "private" initiative. In recent years, policies believed to affect these relationships have become leading items on the development assistance agenda. Primary examples are the rise of structural adjustment lending, with emphases on tariff reform, "liberalization" and "privatization," and the consensus building around the motto, "getting the prices right" as a theme for designing and assessing policy reform. From the perspective of Asia's rural transformation, this theme may simultaneously be a step in correct and incorrect directions.

The theme of "getting the prices right" is a step in a correct direction in the sense that attention is drawn to rural development's broader economic environment and the costs and foregone opportunities that may be associated with "distortions" in that environment. The theme is a step in an incorrect direction, however, to the degree that it assumes that fundamental dimensions of rural transformation can be reliably discerned in the reflections of an external pricing environment. Asia's rural transformation might better be visualized as a prism which significantly (and *without* neutrality) refracts the light from any pricing environment. This means that developmental change in rural areas cannot always be predictably influenced by changes in convenient monetary or economic policy levers alone, but rather that deeply internal dimensions of rural transformation must also be directly recognized and addressed.

For development assistance this means that "getting the prices right" as a

⁷ Montague Yudelman, former Director of the World Bank's Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, has observed: "Creating employment and incomes will take more than increasing agricultural production—important though that will be. Also needed is a regional development strategy based on urban and industrial decentralization, a strategy that creates greater full-time and off-season employment. If the World Bank wants to retain intellectual leadership in development, then it will need to focus on this largely overlooked facet of rural development, as well as on the links between raising agricultural output and creating off-farm employment" [115, pp. 26–27]. The relationships between the changing composition of rural employment and non-agrarian processes have not been well accommodated by development theory (cf. note 5). However, there is growing empirical evidence. See [1] [9] [10] [29] [30] [32] [36] [44] [49] [57] [60] [86] [98] [100].

central theme might well be replaced by a broader refrain of "getting the incentives right." At the minimum, this would require the development assistance community to: (1) give more direct attention to rural institutional arrangements and how they function in relation to technological and economic change; (2) demonstrate clearer recognition of social, economic, and political stratification in Asia's rural societies and their consequences for the sources, volume, destinations, and consequences of investment; and (3) make a commitment to consider steps to improve the management of public services which directly *facilitate* local initiative rather than continuing to emphasize (however nondeliberately) strategies that actually support and even perpetuate the state's (often inefficient) administration of local initiative.

These transitions are not likely to come easily to an international system of official development assistance built around project lending for physical construction, sector-oriented staffing and management, and transaction patterns that have often increased the size and role (if not the capabilities) of domestic public bureaucracies. Nevertheless, the transitions will have to occur if development assistance is going to be relevant to the directions of change in rural Asia and if the community seriously hopes to effectively influence the very policy reform goals it has in recent years chosen to advocate.

A. *Policy Reform: The Dangers of Oversimplification*

The institutions comprising Asia's agricultural support systems (research, extension, credit, buying, milling, storage) have served as mechanisms for bringing goods and services both to and from rural areas in ways that have influenced the allocation of land, labor, and capital within rural resource systems. The net effects of this system have been widely acclaimed as very positive [37] [85] [87] [95]. However, these same institutions also function as policy arenas within and through which social, economic, and political interests both within and outside the institutions operate to allocate scarce administrative resources [19]. As recognition of this point has expanded [33] [66] [71], a sense of unease has grown that the institutions of the agricultural support system do not always permit market forces to operate and worse, that the institutions might be promoting interests that were inefficient. Today, this unease is addressed by the development assistance community in the context of increased attention given to policy reform, particularly with regard to relationships between "government intervention" and market-determined price-formation processes. A fundamental generalization is repeatedly supported: economic development in rural areas is the outcome of policy reforms that reduce government intervention in rural commodity markets.

However, what parts of government would this actually reference? The state's relationships with rural society throughout Asia are multidimensional, employing policies, institutions, and technologies as instruments [46] [69]. For example, while there are the equivalents of Ministries of Agriculture in every country, in almost all cases, governments' relationships with agriculture are only partially exercised by these ministries. Moreover, the case can be made that the role of the ministries in the overall food and agricultural policy formation and imple-

mentation picture is declining while the roles of other agencies, some only nominally connected to agriculture (such as Finance or Trade), are increasing. Strategies such as vertical integration and risk shifting through alliances between market power and state action have become important dimensions of change in the organization of rural commodity systems as the Philippines under Marcos demonstrated [23] [31] [34]. Control of virtually all major agriculture and food commodities—including coconut, sugar, rice, corn, and wheat—were assumed by a variety of “Authorities” outside the normal agricultural support system.

The Philippine case is not unique. The acceleration of state intervention to control rural commodity systems, purportedly for the purposes of stabilizing domestic prices and production in the face of volatile international markets appears to be a pervasive phenomenon throughout Asia, from Japan to Burma. It is precisely against this background that what are now commonly called “parastatal” organizations have arisen. These are quasi-state corporations that have been delegated government powers to regulate, allocate, and tax but which are not routinely accountable to “normal” government staffing, financial management, and reporting conventions. Parastatals have acquired important roles as exclusive agents of the state for commodity trading in many countries of the region. They can have significant implications for the organization and performance of affected rural commodity markets and can be closely associated with the emergence (and state endorsement) of monopsony power in rural resource marketing systems.

The development assistance community lately has been quick to encourage the dismantling of parastatals, but there has not always been adequate analysis of what is actually, as compared to theoretically, being restored. For example, policy liberalization can be a strategy for reducing government’s role in rural commodity markets, the presumed relationship. Policy liberalization can also be a strategy for *enhancing* the state’s role in rural commodity markets by depoliticizing important dimensions of the transformation process—in effect by denying there is any “public” interest in how private economic power is acquired, distributed, and exercised.

For example, in 1985, the United States and the World Bank insisted that the Government of the Philippines curtail the roles of parastatals controlling fertilizer and wheat imports and coconut products exports. Eventually, these demands were formally accepted, but informally subverted by simply converting parastatal power to private economic power. For instance, the Government suspended restrictions on wheat imports, but passed considerable control of wheat distribution to a Marcos associate. Parastatal participation in fertilizer importation was curtailed, but administrative guidelines governing licensing of fertilizer distributors effectively passed the parastatal roles to Marcos cronies.

Biotechnology is another emerging example of growing private economic power that may not serve wider public interests. Biotechnology already shows a significant potential not simply to modify (or in some cases enhance) existing technological bases of agricultural production, food processing and animal husbandry, but also to be very compatible with a restructuring of the economic,

institutional and political foundations of Asia's agriculture [17] [20] [104]. However, what will hybridization of basic cereal crop seeds, a very likely outcome of biotechnology research on rice, mean for Asia's small farmers, the vast majority of whom do not buy seed? What will the linking of broad-spectrum herbicides with specific proprietary cereal varieties, a biotechnology marketing strategy that is already being established, mean for Asia's small farmers, many of whom are not reliably served by private agribusiness systems? Will income inequalities within agrarian Asia be exacerbated, with the better endowed farmers and millers capturing most of the benefits of these technological developments? The broad changes associated with biotechnology have fundamental implications for the roles of public agricultural research and extension and for the types and consequences of privatization that may occur in Asian agriculture. Who will be the agents and the benefactors of the more proprietary technology dissemination systems likely to be facilitated? What will the increasing privatization of germplasm-based research mean for the "publically" supported agricultural support system?

As Bernard Schaffer put it: "Public policy is, after all, what it does. The point is to explain what that is, and then see if that explanation can be an instrument for change and improvement."⁸ In confronting the future of Asian agriculture, it is crucial for the development assistance community to understand what is actually happening, not simply assume what it hopes will happen.

B. *Near-Term Prospects*

In the near-term, development assistance for agricultural and rural development throughout most of Asia will look much as it has looked in the past. The bulk of existing development assistance for rural Asia today represents project commitments made several years ago. Broader rural development concerns that have been acknowledged in the past will be continuing priorities for development assistance. These include, as examples, rural infrastructure, education, employment, and finance. It is also important to emphasize that traditional agricultural development investment is by no means over. There are still important needs for irrigation, roads, research and extension facilities, scientific and technical manpower, etc. In Sri Lanka and India alone, plans to double irrigation service areas during the next decade could entail investments exceeding many billions of dollars. In places such as the Philippines and Indonesia, ensuring existing agricultural infrastructure continues to perform as needed will undoubtedly require additional investment. Improving agricultural development in less well-endowed areas and for limited-resource farmers constitutes a complex and potentially extensive agenda for development assistance in Asia [61] [62]. A substantial need for productive development investment in Asia's small-farm agriculture still exists.

There are also specific country situations that have the potential to represent new or different near-term development assistance situations. For example, economic and political difficulties in the Philippines have led the development

⁸ Quoted in [45, p. 53].

assistance community to pause in its relationships with that country, in order to reconsider existing commitments, rethink new commitments, and attempt a more aggressive policy dialogue than may be feasible elsewhere in Asia. Economic policy reform in Thailand is leading to a dramatic curtailment of foreign borrowing, particularly from ODA sources.

However, what may constitute more of the challenge is not the level of investment needed or forthcoming, but rather *the quality of investment*. Periodically, the quality of investment is recognized as a general challenge for development assistance [59], but vigorous entry of the development assistance community into the domestic policy reform arena of many countries casts a significantly different light on the challenge: concern for where assistance goes has to be wedded to the kinds of analysis supporting investment allocation. In practice, recent confidence by the development assistance community in policy reform as a pivotal element in rural development has not been adequately matched by a consistent and commensurate commitment to understand the political (as well as economic) sources and consequences of domestic policies *and* to integrate such improved understanding with the assistance management process. Staff turnover in bilateral ODA offices, excessive emphasis on economic modeling at the cost of hard political and administrative analysis, a narrow range of skill profiles among ODA agency staff, and other problems in the management of development assistance appear to be the culprits.⁹

While there do not appear to be any innate or insurmountable problems within the ODA community recognizing there are political and social dimensions to economic reform, political and social analysis are frequently treated as inferior knowledge compared to economic modelling of policy determination and outcomes. Too often, what passes for acceptable political and social analysis are actually economic arguments for the market and against government in general. As argued earlier, the development assistance community has appeared too eager to unconditionally embrace the promise of free market metaphors. The community has been considerably less enthusiastic about seriously confronting the implications of the variety of non- and anti-market forces that might be operating in the rural private sector, the sometimes perverse consequences that can follow declining state participation in the rural economy (perverse because the reduction can have the effects of empowering anti-market private forces and placing the burden of adjustment costs on the rural poor and powerless), and the results of weaknesses in a government's capacities to limit such problems. As Sheldon Annis points out, if the ODA community

allows itself to mask an ideological agenda as if it were a set of development principles, not only the poor will be hurt. No one, but least of all the poor, benefits

⁹ Akira Takahashi writes: "For the most part, Japanese personnel involved in the provision of development aid are motivated by a sincere desire to help people in developing regions. Compared with their Western counterparts, they are underpaid, and the overhead costs of projects are less. Yet one cannot help but notice the preponderance of administrators and engineers among their ranks. Few are specialists with area expertise" [105, p. 405]. See also [3].

from inept, overblown public bureaucracies. The issue is whether reasonable house-cleaning of oversized public institutions and revision of policies that pointlessly discourage private investment are used to disguise a more fundamental attack on the role of the state, particularly its responsibility to equalize opportunity on behalf of the have-nots. [3, p. 105]

For example, sustaining agricultural productivity gains and the natural resource base these gains depend on, presents an enormously complex agenda. In the context of rural Asia, this agenda mandates facing very difficult issues such as land and job shortages, agricultural support institutions and infrastructure inadequately financed and maintained, price and market distortions introduced and exacerbated by inappropriate policies, and social and political arrangements that can easily turn strategies for conserving natural resources into opportunities for allocating access to these resources. In the Philippines, for example, the sustainability agenda is inseparable from a broad, difficult and deeply socio-political agrarian reform challenge [64]. In Indonesia, sustaining the rich but fragile natural resource bases of Sumatra and Kalimantan is intimately related to trade-offs between how population and employment problems in densely settled Java are addressed and how issues of ethnic conflict and customary land rights in Sumatra and Kalimantan are addressed, again a broad, difficult, and deeply socio-political challenge. Throughout rural Asia, there is considerable evidence that existing and highly diverse local ideas and practices concerning such things as property rights, resource valuation, and entitlements do not always correspond very well with free market images. It follows that subscribing too rigidly to the formula that simply reducing government's role increases the market's role could be seriously mistaken.

The challenge of sustainability is to find the economic, political, and social arrangements that will work. While realistically, outcomes and commitments can be influenced in the short run by the volume of development assistance funds available, in the longer term the matter really rests on what any funds are actually used for. This is a question of ideas and insight. The opportunities Asia's rural transformation presents for development assistance therefore do not revolve around capital flows nearly as much as they do around ideas about how best to use capital. However, to see these opportunities, it is first necessary for the development assistance community to better understand how rural Asia is actually changing. How can this understanding be generated?

IV. SOME NEW DIRECTIONS

An essential key to understanding rural transformation will be a commitment to the premise that rural transformation in Asia cannot now be comprehended through the myopic vision of any single "discipline" nor with the self-assurance of any single ideology, not in a region as diverse and plural as Asia [16] [84] [91]. The emphasis must first lie with understanding rural transformation, not imposing disciplinary definitions or ideological prescriptions. Several starting points already exist. One is a reassessment of existing rural development pro-

gramming. Successes, failures, and lessons are being weighed and balanced in efforts to determine how assistance can best identify and address rural development goals [5] [108]. Encouraging outcomes have included improving communication between development assistance agencies on country rural development programming, strengthening the role of evaluation in the project development and implementation cycle, exploring new forms of co-financing and disbursement management, and increasing the commitment to economic policy research. However, for the most part, these activities remain to be effectively linked with each other and with the basic project development cycle within most development assistance agencies. Moreover, numerous important areas of needed understanding remain inadequately attended. Three major examples are discussed.

Institutional development. The transformation of rural Asia presents complex challenges to both private and public enterprises to adapt and contribute. For example, the challenge of labor skill development is a broad challenge to the mission and management of educational institutions. The challenge of economic diversification is a broad challenge to capacity-building among regional and local governments. The challenge of agriculture's future is a broad challenge to the roles and composition of the agricultural support system. In these and other cases, policy reforms will need to include potentially broad changes in the mission, governance, organization, management, staffing, and funding of a variety of institutions as part of embracing new capacities. While certainly these matters do receive attention now, usually as elements of project design and implementation and less frequently as "institution-building" for particular sectors, much remains to be done to reach an appropriate balance between policy reform goals and institutional change as a necessary component of reaching such goals. For example, there is a rising chorus of calls for privatization of rural development initiatives. This needs to be matched by a parallel commitment to better understand alternatives to public bureaucracies for supporting such initiatives, especially alternatives that can be viably institutionalized in specific rural contexts. Even as this is better understood, it is not likely to mean that there will be no role for public bureaucracies. Too much experience in Asia suggests that ultimately active public sector support of privatization is necessary. Consequently, there needs to be substantially greater commitment to learn how strategies to reorient and restructure public bureaucracies can actually be made to work [11] [107]. Finally, advocacy of the market has to be accompanied by a much firmer commitment to improve understanding of how rural markets that are not characterized by significant levels of monopsony and monopoly can be developed and institutionalized, an absolutely crucial issue throughout rural Asia.

Human resource development. Rural Asia's primary resources are its people. With the exception of educational and health programming, however, which have been very important, rural human resource development has not been given adequate direct attention in the ODA portfolio for rural Asia. Yet, perhaps the single biggest challenge presented by Asia's rural transformation is the question: between now and the end of this century, how will hundreds of millions of rural Asians learn to productively participate in a rapidly changing rural economy

and opportunity system? Facing such an enormous challenge, increased conventional educational investment can only be a partial answer. Much broader thinking will be needed to understand the roles that can be played by many rural institutions, well beyond schools to institutions ranging from rural banks to community organizations, in what can be accurately described as a social learning process. The development assistance community is moving in this direction [73], but much more needs to be done. For example, documenting changes in the structure of rural employment in Asia needs to be matched by a commensurate interest in documenting rural entrepreneurship and enterprise formation. Similarly advocacy for a range of vocational education strategies needs to be matched by enthusiasm for understanding how those rural people who have already entered the work transition acquired the skills to do it. Such things will need to be understood if broader thinking is going to advance.

Rural-urban relations. Urban and rural futures in Asia are increasingly intertwined [72] [78]. For example, Asia's urban future is vulnerable to impacts of rural change that go beyond food supplies and urban labor markets. Rural transformation as social, cultural, and political mobilization can introduce forms of rural cohesion, conflict, and collective action into urban places, but without the supporting social infrastructure. Conversely, when urban management attempts to insulate urban places from the effects of rural transformation (e.g., through regulating rural migration, forced relocation of urban squatters to sites outside a city, or zoning), poorer, less-skilled, and ethnically marginal persons can be excluded from a rural-urban migration stream. This leaves greater proportions of such individuals in rural areas while, at the same time, an urban-to-rural stream of poor, unskilled, ethnically marginal persons can be effectively precipitated out of the urban milieu [15] [53] [96]. All of this suggests a very important interactive process. Rural transformation impacts life in urban places. Attempts to better manage the life and future of urban places inevitably impacts life in rural places. A simple but significant implication follows: rural transformation and the future of urban places need to be understood together. However, what stands in the way is the reality of deeply entrenched divisions between rural and urban skills and interests throughout the development assistance community, divisions that make comprehending the significance of rural-urban relations very difficult.

However, to better understand such matters as institutional development, human resource development, and rural-urban relations, much more than research is needed. The development assistance community needs new forms of interaction with rural Asia, interaction not so heavily mediated by the interests of public bureaucracies that in a very tangible sense, thrive on development assistance projects. Unfortunately, when projects are the main instrument of interaction, this kind of relationship is inevitable. Policy dialogue represents a potentially valuable upgrading of interaction, but at present policy dialogue appears to be excessively leveraged by short-term financial considerations.

Development assistance agencies are not unaware of this problem and they do have some instruments available to moderate the problem. For example, sector reviews are a potentially valuable antidote, *provided* that they bridge diverse

project experiences and broader analyses of rural development trends. Here, unfortunately, the tendency within most official development assistance agencies to separate country analysis, evaluation departments, and economic research offices does not bode well for the kinds of integrative analyses needed. Broad issue papers and reports, the most well-known example being the annually issued *World Development Report* from the World Bank, are also potentially important antidotes to short-term thinking. However, it is important to recognize that there are very real limits on the direct impacts these publications (and the discussions that precede them) have on programming and resource allocation within the development assistance community. Multilateral assistance agencies in particular have become very complex organizations with large staffs, innumerable departments and divisions, and characteristic career paths which all tend to resist lateral and synthetic views of problems and strategies.

In fact, the development assistance community needs to both encourage and become more directly involved in wider discussions about fundamental changes in rural Asia and what these changes mean. One possibility for doing this may well be dialogue. However, at the moment, development assistance is relying excessively on dialogue that attempts to pilot a confident hope for applied economics into the breach of short-term balance of payments problems. A broader and less opportunistic dialogue is needed, not limited to "normal" development assistance bureaucrats and their supporters, but expanded to include a deeper cross-section of those who are "living" rural transformation—such as entrepreneurs, village leaders, rural organizers, educational innovators, and the like. For example, dialogue organized around a (re)assessment of the contemporary significance of rural innovation [58] in economic activity, social organization, and even cultural expression could prove to be a powerful way of learning what Asia's rural transformation is, what transformation means, what rural society is becoming, and where development assistance can play a constructive role—as a conduit for capital, as a stimulant of insight, and as a builder of analysis and method.

CONCLUSION

The most fundamental implication of Asia's rural transformation for the future of development assistance to rural Asia is that the development assistance community must recognize more fully than it has that it is more *and it must continue to become more* than a financial intermediary alone. The balance sheets for development assistance will continue to be impressive pictures of capital movements in support of Asia's agricultural and rural development. However, assessing the quality of these obligations will require looking beyond the balance sheets and asking: is the development assistance community recognizing broader changes in Asia's socioeconomic development and what these changes mean for the relevance and status of existing development goals and strategies? Can the development assistance community mobilize itself, in terms of staffing, organization, and resource allocation, to better understand these changes and what they mean for the roles of development assistance?

Asia's rural transformation increasingly is such a challenge. The transformation

certainly does not alter the fact that development costs money, but the growing complexity of Asia's rural development demands significantly better insight and expertise even more than it demands new money. Only as the transformation of rural Asia is better understood can development assistance understand how it can actually encourage and strengthen markets, facilitate and support broadly based private initiative, and stimulate and nurture political processes that pursue and protect wider public interests.

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