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FACTORS INFLUENCING RURAL DEVELOPMENT

A short Introductory Note
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The title of the subject we are to examine is: Factors influencing rural development. In the document to be distributed later, you will notice that there is practically no reference to any work or study on the subject. This does not mean that I have deliberately ignored research in this field. There are two main reasons why I have not used references. The first is that I was determined to avoid inflicting on you a heavy, academic paper, difficult to read and full of footnotes. The second reason, because the subject is so important, I preferred to stimulate serious thought on the basis of your own experience, of the factors likely to influence rural development generally and, especially, in Africa. My statement, therefore, will be more in the nature of a compendium or review of certain factors which will serve as a starting point for discussion, leading to a general appraisal of the factors likely to influence rural development.

I must admit that I had some hesitation in selecting a methodology. The factors influencing rural development might be good or bad, promoting or retarding it. Following the conventional distinction between good and bad, I was tempted to divide these factors into two groups: the good and the bad. I soon realized that the factors in question could not easily be fitted into any such grouping. Consequently, I preferred to adopt a classification based on the nature of the factors concerned.

The study contains seven chapters of varying length. The first deals with the ways in which the success of rural development programmes is influenced by geographical factors; the second is concerned with the part technical factors play in such programmes; the third looks at the ecology of biological problems arising from human adjustment to environment. In chapters four and five which raise philosophical and psychological considerations, we shall examine problems of rural development, as they affect individual men and women with their own distinctive attitudes and reflex reactions. In chapter six which contains reflections on sociology, an attempt will be made to consider the various problems

that must be solved by rural development programmes. These are indeed numerous because man, by and large, the peasant, especially in Africa, is a social being "en situation", with his own habits, responses, reactions etc. to a given set of circumstances. The final chapter will examine economic factors which will inevitably raise a number of tricky questions, such as the following:

- (1) Why establish development programme?
- (2) Is the aim of such programme to make the peasant rich or poor?
- (3) How does the nation benefit from such development programmes?
- (4) Do the efforts made invariably produce the expected results?

After this somewhat lengthy introduction, it is perhaps time to go to the heart of the matter.

CHAPTER I

Geographical factors

There is no doubt that rural development programmes are influenced for good or ill by geographical circumstance. The influence of geographical factors is particularly noticeable in the matter of climate, which should be carefully studied before any rural development programme is implemented. Otherwise, there is the risk of investing large sums in projects doomed to failure. Instead of indulging in purely speculative analysis, it would perhaps be more useful to take actual examples from Africa to drive home the importance of these factors.

Any list of the important agricultural products from Africa which are sold on the international market, would include cocoa, oil palm products, cotton groundnuts, cashava, tobacco, rice, coconut products, dates and citrus fruit. Two serious problems arise in connexion with this list, which is not by any means exhaustive.

In the first place, the conditions governing the production of these various agricultural commodities are very different. The conditions for growing swamp rice are not the same as those for growing the oil palm. Cocoa calls for different conditions of growth from cotton. Consequently, the greatest care must be exercised when introducing into our individual countries a crop which has succeeded elsewhere with remarkable success, enhancing the country's prestige and filling its coffers. The fact that cocoa grows extremely well in Ghana or Togo is not reason why it should grow well in Dahomey. Nor does the thriving

condition of the oilpalm in Dahomey argue the same results for the Niger. Altitude, rainfall, the degree of humidity, sunshine, the presence or absence of adequate forests to provide or eliminate shade, and flora determining the composition of the soil, in short all the conditions that may operate to the advantage of a given crop must be studied with the greatest care. It is obviously impossible to make a comprehensive survey which would be valid for all African countries and capable of being applied to them indiscriminately. This is merely a first approach to draw attention to what must be taken into account, but does not exclude the necessary exhaustive appraisal of the geographical factors that will provide all the elements required in the search for effective solutions.

In spite of the greatest care in studying these geographical factors and the most prudent measures to make the regional programme reasonably safe, there still remains a geographical factor which it is difficult to forestal, in the sudden events generally referred to as natural disasters. Take the example of a given region in which intensive coconut cultivation has begun after completing all the preliminary investigations affecting rainfall, soil conditions etc. The first two or three seasons happen to be normal but, suddenly, in the fourth season the actual rainfall is three to four times more than the estimated amount. The result is that the whole crop is under water, the seedlings are suffocated and the entire programme is jeopardized with all the consequences that follow. It is not easy to take absolute precautions against such disasters without making the projects excessively costly and, consequently, uneconomic. It is, however, possible to anticipate as far as possible, by taking a series of measures which would leave room for manoeuvre.

These two simple examples are enough to show the importance of geographical factors as far as the success of any co-ordinated rural development is concerned. If the factors mentioned appear as obvious truisms, it is because they are inescapable prerequisites. As such, it was impossible to overlook them in the opening chapter of this statement.

CHAPTER, T H A I I

Technical factors

As soon as we begin to think of the agricultural tools traditionally used by the African peasant, the hoe, cutlass, spade, and a rudimentary form of plough spring to mind. These tools are really quite cheap and provide the village blacksmith with what he needs for his family and himself. Anyone requiring such tools can easily get them; perhaps not all the year round but, at least, during the harvest season.

Several attempts have been made to improve them as a result of the determination to renovate African agriculture. Animal draught farming has been introduced, using the donkey, horse, bullock and other animals. In a number of instances, insuperable problems have been encountered. Some of them at first seem ridiculous but, being human problems, are a real drag on technical progress. Some ethnic groups regard the donkey as a hideous animal with which they will have nothing to do. Among certain peoples, the horse is a noble beast that should not be used as a draught animal; moreover, in some places, nothing is known about the upkeep of animals, which very soon perish for want of care. Generally, the purchase price and the cost of upkeep are beyond the means of the peasant, and a modest improvement in traditional farming methods is compromised from the start.

The introduction of modern farming techniques raises a number of problems. At every level insuperable difficulties arise in connexion with costs whether for purchase, use, maintenance or manpower. It is out of the question to ask a peasant drafted into a national rural development programme to purchase a bulldozer, as the average price of a good one is something like 50,000. The purchase of a plough, from the standpoint of cost, is a more feasible proposition. The acquisition of modern farming equipment, from bulldozer to thresher, a machine for digging up tubers, not to mention a weeding-machine, among other is beyond the reach of any African peasant.

Nothing will be said of problems arising from the need to adapt imported machines or to make new machines which will be more suitable to the type of soil met with in Africa. Any of us here who have had experience know that these are often false problems, in any case, minor ones. Adequate solutions can easily be found, if there is an awareness of the problem.

Yet it is true that whenever reference is made to technical progress in the rural African environment, the picture in our mind is to bring our peasants up to the technical level of the European or North American peasant. If a little thought is given to the technical, human and financial problems with which Africa is now faced, a leap forward such as this is unlikely to take place in the immediate future. That is why co-operative and community development movements, as well as all the movements designed to regroup peasants and villagers, are the best contribution that can be made to the technical progress of the African peasant. The more peasants there are in a production group, the greater the chances that any contribution they are asked to make for the purchase of modern tools might approximate to what they would have to pay for the purchase of traditional tools.

Ecological Factors

CHAPTER III

In this chapter, we shall consider problems with which rural development programmes must reckon, as far as the relationships of human beings to their natural environment are concerned. Ecological factors affect rural development programmes in three ways: from the standpoint of vegetation, animals and humans.

I

Vegetation

Obviously, great attention must be paid to conditions governing the life and adaptability of plants to their environment whenever there is any attempt to implement a rural development programme. The need for this is even greater when the programme involves planting new crops in a particular area. The adoption of foreign products or the mere transfer of products from one region to another may spread hitherto unknown bacteria which may affect the nature of the soil and compel the seedlings in that area to develop resistance, in varying degrees. When a disease appears in a particular region, it sometimes happens that several generations of seedlings are necessary to produce a strain which, though not new, will prove sufficiently resistant to outlive the disease. Those of us who have had the opportunity of travelling on the Benin coast in recent years, certainly remember the hideous spectacle of vast stretches of coconut groves laid waste by an unknown disease which some experts delight in calling leaf mould. In spite of this dread disease, some coconut trees survived and still produce coconuts. They managed somehow to resist or adjust to the new conditions of life which appeared in their natural environment.

Quite obviously, it is almost impossible to anticipate all the results, good or bad, of ecological factors on rural development programmes. Actually, it is difficult to determine in advance with any degree of accuracy, the possible reactions of a plant to new conditions that may arise in a given environment. This would require costly research which Africa cannot yet afford, the results of which will not begin to appear under two to three generations,

II

Animals

As far as animals are concerned the problem seems, without exaggeration, to be relatively easier. If animals are unable to adjust to new conditions of life that arise in their natural environment, they can be moved to other places in search of living conditions similar to those to which they are accustomed. Certain breeds of cattle can live only on high plateau ; other will survive only in a particular type of plain, and there are others still which adapt very readily to conditions in the tree-ridden valleys. It is fairly easy to observe the living conditions to which a given type is accustomed. It is also easy to organize a mass migration if the need arises. But where the problem is one coping with a general disaster, it is a different matter, and the only elements which may prove useful in finding a solution are to be had by studying the breeds which have managed to survive.

III

Humans

The trickiest of all the three ecological aspects concerns humans. Rural development programmes have been worked out to meet the needs of human and make them a little happier than they were. They were not meant to sacrifice them on the altar of a purely theoretical ideal.

The serious ecological problem affecting humans is the wholesale transfer of people to implement some new, dynamic project. Any human, any peasant is something more than the mere ability to stand up to the climate in which he lives. Apart from a suitable climate, he must have ideal conditions to use his physical energies in the best interests of the particular programme. Consequently, instead of waiting until he has contracted all the existing local diseases, and got rid of them before he can be made use of, a systematic drive in preventive measures should be undertaken to ensure that the new environment is as health as the previous one, or else that the peasant's physical resistance is built up so that his energies for work may remain intact.

We are all aware that the problem of the large African valleys is still with us. It is unfortunate that the most fertile African lands are at present literally deserted by human beings because they are infested with sleeping-sickness or river blindness (ONCHOCERCHOSIS). In these two instances, there is no question of any human adaptation: death or blindness is the inevitable result. The problem here is to change nature which must adapt itself to man. In short, disease must be put to flight.

CHAPTER IV

The philosophical factor

The title of this chapter is bound to make some of you smile and wonder what philosophy has to do with a conference like this, where practical problems of rural development are being discussed, problems that have nothing in common with philosophical speculation. I would like to reassure you that the philosophy referred to here is a very down-to-earth philosophy, primarily concerned with cosmogony, the mental picture the African has of the world around him, the way he views the world, and exploits its potential to satisfy his daily needs. The peasant's view of the world and the way he looks at life are often a major handicap to progress in some rural areas in Africa. Once again, a practical example is the best one to illustrate the importance of this phenomenon.

In far too many rural areas in Africa, ridging, furrowing, sowing and planting are seldom rectangular, being ususally round. This has many disadvantages when any attempt is made to introduce modern farming machines, which require straight lines if they are to be used to good effect, without uprooting or destroying the sown grain or the young seedlings. Even animal draught at the most rudimentary level with an improved hoe requires a straight line. Yet, it was extremely difficult to convince a number of peasants that they should adopt the straight line, if they wanted to get yields. The difficulty can be simply explained. If you leave the narrow confines of this hall and look around, you will not see a single straight line on the horizon; all the natural shapes that evoke wonder and admiration are round, and the African peasant concludes that nature can hardly yield up its riches if its fundamental laws are flouted, the law of primary importance being that all things are round. Consequently, the ridge must be round as well as the furrow, or the hole which receives the grain: itself a rounded object. The geometry to which the African peasant is wedded is not Euclid's but Rymann's.

This simple attitude to environment, the world and nature stems from a very careful observation of the world. This, in turn, has produced a general philosophy which is basic to the peasant's attitude to farming, production and, by corollary, his sense of economic profitability.

The introduction of new farming techniques can therefore be equated with a process of radically changing the peasant's basic philosophy and overall concept of the universe. As such, quite apart from its economic and social aspects, rural development becomes an undertaking designed to bring about a basic change in mental outlook and deeply rooted habits of thought, as well as in a general view of the universe.

CHAPTER V

Psychological factors

Psychological factors are really attitudes: the attitude of the African peasant to progress, production, selling and speculation, income and wealth. What do the ideas of progress, production, speculation, income and wealth mean in the rural areas? It is not at all easy to strike an average for Africa as a whole since the continent is a composite whole, a unity in diversity. The various human groupings are not by any means identical and they react differently to the same stimuli.

When rural development specialists tell African peasants that by working a little harder and using modern farming methods, they will contribute to the economic and social progress of their family, village, region and country, what lies behind the idea of progress, in the sense in which the African peasant uses the term? Does it mean simply eating and drinking well, and sleeping comfortably? He certainly has a very definite idea of what family and village connote but what does he make of the terms region and country in the sense of fartherland? These are realities, of course, but hardly likely to arouse the peasant's enthusiasm or drive him to fanaticism.

The ideas of selling and speculation also require serious adjustment. Traditionally, the African peasant does not produce goods for sale or speculation. He does so to live or get the necessary means to pay his taxes and or organize the large number of family festivities. Money grabbing, sharp practice, the mercenary exploitation of social needs and vice, in other words, the accumulation of wealth are relatively new activities which it will take African peasants time to get attuned to.

Since economic and social progress in the rural areas automatically implies all these notions of values or evils, rural development creates a new psychological dimension in the rural areas.

CHAPTER VI

Sociological factors

Sociological factors are at once anthropological and political.

Anthropological aspects:

The major anthropological factor which any rural development programme must take into account is social organization and the role which every member of the society has to play. A male does not fulfil the same role as a young man, a middle-aged man or an old man or a girl, a mature woman or an old woman. In the particular aspect with which we are concerned, work in the field, these roles are very clearly defined. Felling trees, clearing bush, ploughing, sowing, weeding, harvesting, threshing, hunting - all the activities which enable the peasant to sustain life, are very meticulously apportioned between the various age groups or sexes. The strict observance of their apportionment of duties and responsibilities, is a considerable factor in speeding up established programmes.

Here is an example. It was noticed that in the region of a country where rice was a common crop, its introduction was meeting with very little success. On enquiry, it was found that there were reasons for this.

1. Rice-growing in this region is generally undertaken by men.
2. Since rice-growing was an experiment, the results of which could not be predicted, the promoters of the project were reluctant to hand over the programme immediately to men who are the family's seasonal bread winners. Consequently, they approached the women.
3. The women turned up their noses at the project, because it ran counter to their traditional duties.
4. The men forbade the women to implement the programme, because these new duties brought them down in the social scale, and gave considerable latitude to women. Indeed because they were engaged in working on a cash crop, they might well become independent members of the family.

As the programme was systematically sabotaged by all the important sections of the society, it had to be completely reviewed and prevented from failing utterly. That unfortunate start still produces an adverse effect on the rate of progress. From the very outset of any rural development programme, it is important, therefore, to do nothing rashly which is likely to interfere with social organization. Respect for the status and economic role assigned to each person in the society is to begin with, if not a pledge of success, at least a guarantee against combined sabotage and utter failure.

II

Political aspects

The factors of political sociology which influence for good or ill programmes of rural development, relate to the political system and political power authority. Even without giving any examples, the point at issue can quite easily be appreciated. All political systems, under whatever name or "ism" they are known, can be roughly divided into two groups:

(1) The type of system where power is entirely in the hands of a single party.

(2) The type in which the party in power is constantly attacked by one, two or a number of other parties.

Political authority, as such, is exercised in two ways:

(1) Ineffectively. In this case it fails to win respect, is ineffective and, to all intents and purposes, non-existent.

(3) Dynamically and effectively. It is then powerful and efficient.

These two possibilities, as applied to political systems or authority, exercise a great deal of interference. A multi-party system may have powerful, efficient political authority while a one-party system might be ineffective and, virtually non-existent.

The success of rural development programmes depends on an ideal combination of the political system and the political authority or power. When it is remembered that in Africa rural development programmes are concerned with peasant who form the majority of the electorate, the importance of what is at stake and the tremendous possibilities for "one-upmanship" can be fully appreciated. In a multi-party system, there are two possibilities:

- (1) The programme is worked out and put into effect entirely by the party in power. In such a case, it will be constantly criticized, irrespective of any good points in it, and doubt will be created in the minds of the peasants, who may very well fail to do their best in implementing a programme, exalted by some and vilified by others.
- (2) The programme may be worked out and put into effect by all the political parties, after discussion and adoption. In this case, the risks are reduced, at least from an official standpoint, it being quite clear that the opposition parties are free at any time to dissociate themselves.

Again, an inefficient political authority may produce the best development programme in the world. However, it would serve no useful purpose, as long as the political power lacks the necessary drive and energy to see it through. On the other hand, a dynamic, powerful political authority may work out an absolutely harmful rural development programme and see it through in every detail. Nothing further need be said. This theoretical argument will have given you the necessary factors for arriving at a fair evaluation of the effective role that can be played by factors of political sociology in the successful elaboration and implementation of development programmes.

C H A P T E R VII

Economic factors

An analysis of the economic factors raises serious scruples which relate to the transfer of African peasants from a traditional economy which might be described as "an economy that is not need-conscious" to a modern market economy which is governed essentially by the law of the jungle; and to the integration of the African peasant into international economic structures, which, in present circumstances, seem to do more harm than good to Africa. Were we wise in bringing it about, and are we acting prudently in maintaining it?

No attempt will be made to answer these two serious questions; we shall be content to explain them.

In the Africa rural environment, where the peasant produces not to live, since his needs are limited, it is difficult to starve. The economy is essentially a means of production to meet the elementary needs of the group,

and is not in any way a market economy. Consequently, the basic principle of such an economy is humanism: economic and social humanism. In the various transactions it is not money that counts, but the satisfaction of a human need, with the result that man is always the prime subject of consideration. It is quite other with a modern market economy where daily attempts are made to pilfer and get rich.

Modern rural development programmes which necessarily take African peasants out of a subsistence economy and plunge them into a market economy, are responsible for the creation of a class of rich farmers, which must necessarily lead to the appearance of a rural proletariat. Such programmes tend naturally to eliminate human elements and lead to the disappearance of economic and social humanism.

Can humanism not be kept along with progress? That is the big question.

Again, the mass production of commodities for international trade raises another set of scruples. The price of commodities keeps on falling and we are faced with the paradox that the more peasant produces, the less profit he makes. Have we the right to introduce into a rural development programme the cultivation of products which we know will not find a ready market and, when they do, fetch ridiculously low prices? This is the second question.

C O N C L U S I O N

I am near the end of my statement and the conclusion will be very brief, as we shall work it out together after discussion, on the following premises.

1. We can avoid the harmful effects of geographical factors if we take a few simple precautions. As far as natural disasters are concerned, we must wait till they come and try to find such solutions as we can afford.
2. Ecology is not really a major handicap, being a matter of prudence, precaution and, occasionally, evidence.
3. Technical factors are a problem of credit. However rural development can be brought about by spending vast sums, or by making a moderate outlay, with similar results. It is therefore a matter of intelligence or ingenuity.

4. The fourth premise relates to the factors of political sociology. As technicians, our job is to execute not to decide. Our responsibility to the peasant compels us to succeed irrespective of the orientation, value and efficiency of the system or authority in power. This is by no means an easy task.
5. Should production be undertaken to provide cheap products for sale to other persons or to meet individual needs? A choice, an option, or decision must be made, and it will depend on our sense of awareness, our stage of maturity.
6. The final consideration is this. All the other factors: anthropology, philosophy, the disappearance of economic humanism or psychology, point to one question: Should rural development be brought about with or without the peasant's consent? In other words, is the rural development agent the Governor, the Prefect, the District Officer or District Commissioner, the policeman or the rural animator and the agricultural extension worker?

If it is decided to embark on rural development with the consent and goodwill of the peasant, some account will have to be taken of his mental outlook, reactions, his capacity for development, change and adjustment. This means that we must get to know, and understand the peasant; he must be encouraged, "motivated", stimulated and mobilized, if he is to throw himself fully into the rural development programme. This is the factor which exerts the greatest influence on rural development.

In my view, our discussion this morning should centre on the ways and means of mobilizing the peasant along the lines suggested, and getting him to participate fully in the rural development programme.