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PROBLEMS AND OBJECTIVES OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT  
IN WEST AFRICA

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## INTRODUCTION

1. The Moshi Conference<sup>1/</sup> defined "Rural Development" as: "The outcome of a series of quantitative and qualitative changes occurring among a rural population and whose converging effects indicate in time a rise in the standard of living and favourable changes in the way of life" of the people concerned. If you accept this definition, as a starting point for the work of this expert meeting, at least two implications become immediately obvious.
2. The first concerns the "quantitative and qualitative changes" which should characterize rural development - and, for that matter, national development as a whole. The quantitative change implies sustained economic growth, as evidenced by an increasing rate of productivity and of national income. The qualitative change involves a progressive improvement of a wide range of human and institutional situations, such as:
  - a. conditions under which production, marketing, etc. are undertaken;
  - b. motivation and rational attitude of the rural people to work and to the modernization process;
  - c. policies and institutional arrangements, social engineering, organization, management and administration; and
  - d. the standard of living: food consumption, nutrition and health; education and training; housing and environmental conditions; social security; personal and family income; social welfare; etc.
3. When considered jointly, both the quantitative and qualitative changes should imply a modernization process, which would simultaneously increase the productive capacity of the rural family, raise and sustain the standard of living of the rural population as a whole, and promote national economic growth. This is the unified concept of growth and development which, in recent times, appears to be gaining some acceptance by national planners. This concept forms the essential basis for the rural development strategy, which this expert group is expected to consider. And I shall welcome critical comments, views and suggestions regarding its application to West African conditions.

<sup>1/</sup> Africa Regional Conference on the Integrated Approach to Rural Development, Moshi (Tanzania), 13-24 October 1969.

4. Secondly, in the definition quoted, there is an obvious implication that the developmental activities of our respective African governments should concentrate more on the rural sector than has been the case so far. This implication hardly needs any defence. In fact, for many African Governments, the development of the rural sector is already assuming a priority objective in their national development plans and programming. The reasons and the need for such a definite bias in the national development strategy are many; but, for the particular purpose of this presentation, I will cite only five cogent reasons.

(a) Sheer weight of rural population

5. The preponderance of the West African population lives in rural communities and is engaged in the rural economy. Rural activities, such as agriculture, forestry, hunting and fishing (and we might include even mining), affect the majority of the economically active population in this sub-region. (See Table 1).

6. For the whole of Africa, it is estimated that, in 1969, the economically active population totalled 140 million workers. Of these, the percentage engaged in agriculture and related rural activities varied from 40 per cent in North Africa, to an average of 10 per cent for Africa south of the Sahara; and only about 9 per cent was engaged in industry. As shown in Table 1, there is a very high proportion of the West African labour force still engaged in the primary rural production sector, with agriculture as the most important economic activity. The proportion engaged in agriculture is as high as 97 per cent in Niger, and about 65 per cent in the Ivory Coast.

(b) Main source of foreign currency

7. Apart from the fact that rural activities occupy and will continue, for some time, to occupy the larger part of the economically active population in all West African countries, they are also the main source of foreign currency for procuring the much needed capital goods which our Governments rely upon for accelerating their development programmes.

(c) Main source of raw material

Furthermore, the West African rural sector constitutes the main, if not the only, source of raw material for existing or projected industries - which are themselves dependent upon the expansion of agriculture.

(d) A sector, too long neglected

9. For ages, of time, before national independence, our African village communities had lived their own lives without being closely integrated with national governments and other aspects of the greater society. Government and local communities were thus constituted as two different worlds, with limited contact between the two and little understanding of each other's situation. The colonial authorities were interested primarily in the collection of raw materials for export and in the exercise of a monopoly for the importation of manufactures. Therefore, the roads, railways and waterways were all organized, not to open the rural areas but to provide convenient outlays for the rural exportable products to the sea ports. And so the main centres of economic activity and relative prosperity in the countries of the sub-region have turned out to be the towns and the industrial enclaves, such as the capitals of government administration and the mining townships. The rest of the country often consists of isolated villages, which grow a few export crops or depend almost entirely on subsistence farming. All these have tended to emphasize all the more the sharp contrast between our urban and rural areas.

10. Thus, in contrast to the great progress made in our African towns and cities, our rural sector has so far practically remained at the same level of living as in the pre-independence days. Apart from the fact that this constitutes a social injustice in itself, it has created a number of problems which have severely slowed down economic development affecting the entire population. The low level of living of the African rural population is an extremely important reason for poor crop yields and low productivity on the farms. It is also responsible for the slow development of industry and other economic activities.

(e) The need for a comprehensive approach to rural development

11. Since independence, all West African governments have attempted one form or other of sectoral approaches, in order to accelerate development in the rural sector. Emphasis has been placed upon purely agricultural development and stock improvement by the ministries of Agriculture; and various sectoral extension services in nutrition, in adult education and in organized community development have been promoted by other individual ministries. Since all these have, by and large, not produced the anticipated quick results, the attention of many African governments has naturally turned to a broader approach, involving the rural people

themselves: their traditional and changing institutions their values their conditions of work their motivations and their way of life generally. And it has become evident that to change all these basic qualitative constraining factors in the life of rural population the purely sectoral approach would not quite be adequate. The new rural development strategy which is emerging should enable national policies plans machinery and action to be designed on a comprehensive basis and in such a fashion that agricultural institutions mass media and education rural health and nutrition science and technology and community development etc. could all be jointly organized into one comprehensive and integrated programme of rural development. Such an approach should also necessarily involve the stimulation of a combination of factors including the active participation of the rural people themselves physical and economic factors relevant to rural development institutional factors which would ensure a sound framework of support to rural development and an appropriate administrative machinery for integrating all aspects of rural development at the local and national levels. This in short is the concept of the integrated rural development approach which has emerged both at national and international levels.

12. For our plenary discussions tomorrow we shall have the chance of examining and of even challenging the validity of the very concept of integrated rural development. More than that we shall attempt to achieve some consensus as to the appropriate methods and strategies which need to be pursued by our West African governments in order to bring about the urgent transformation required in the rural economy.

13. Right now we need to undertake a realistic review of the major development problems and bottlenecks which seriously constrain the efforts of our governments in their endeavours to bring about the desired rural transformation. And we need to assess the extent to which the stated objectives of the national development plans do in fact take cognizance of these problems. In other words the questions for which we must find some answers are:

- (a) What are the major rural development problems which currently face our governments in this sub-region?
- (b) How do the national development plans assess these problems; and how do they set about resolving them?
- (c) And to what success?

WHAT ARE THE PROBLEMS?

14. Researches into the socio-economic problems which are being encountered by West African Governments, in the process of rural development, have clearly led us to believe that, among the most crucial needs of our rural communities, the following general problems stand out most prominently.

(a) The rate of economic growth is being outpaced by that of population growth

15. For Africa, as a whole, it has been estimated that economic product per head of population has been growing by less than 2 per cent per annum in 20 countries, which contain about 72 per cent of the Region's total population. Five countries have been registering a growth per capita rate of between 2 and 3 per cent per annum; and there are only 9 countries whose product per head has exceeded 3 per cent per year. This is the state of our income. On the expenditure side, the latest available estimates of population growth indicate an overall average of 2.5 per cent per annum. This means that, if the big majority of Africa's population are to be expected to maintain even their present standard of living, their product per head must be growing by at least 3 per cent per annum, since the annual growth rate of 72 per cent of Africa's population (under 2 per cent) is already being completely absorbed by the faster rate of increase (2.5 per cent per annum) in their population.

16. If we examine this problem at the West African level, the latest figures available indicate for the following 7 countries:

	<u>Plan Period</u>	<u>Assumed rate of Increase (per cent per annum)</u>	
		<u>Population</u>	<u>Per Capita GDP</u>
1. GHANA :	1963/64 - 69/70	2.6	2.9
2. MALI:	1961 - 65	2.5	5.5
3. MAURITANIA :	1963 - 66	1.3	7.9
4. NIGER:	1961 - 74	2.5	2.3
5. NIGERIA:	1962 - 66	2.5	1.5
6. SENEGAL:	1965 - 69	2.3	3.7
7. TOGO:	1966 - 70	1.9	3.7

17. Such relatively slow rates of economic growth do create significant problems, which affect level of consumption, foreign exchange earnings and public expenditures and investments. And the remedy lies mainly in higher productivity and modernization of the rural sector.

(b) Inadequate rural socio-economic infrastructure

18. The great efforts being made by West African Governments towards accelerating the development and modernization of the rural economy are fraught with grave constraints:

- (i) rigid traditional agrarian structures which do not easily permit land improvement measures, nor provide incentives to farmers, for better production;
- (ii) difficulties of obtaining sufficient water for irrigation, drinking and domestic purposes;
- (iii) problems of obtaining adequate credit facilities - including the inculcation of enforced savings and capital formation at the local level - for production purposes;
- (iv) lack of adequate feeder roads and communications to provide access to market centres; and lack of adequate marketing facilities; and
- (v) lack of a deliberately integrated programme of rural development, at the local level, which embrace the principal extension services in agriculture, health, nutrition, functional education, community development etc.

(c) Low level of health, nutrition and education, within a context of population growth

19. The generally very low level of health and nutrition in the sub-region acts as a serious drag on the working capacity and productivity of the rural labour force. And this situation is likely to be aggravated by the current trend of rapid population growth and low levels of per capita incomes.

(d) Social and cultural obstacles to change and development

20. These include out-moded social institutional structures, inflexible customs and attitudes to work and to life - all of which combine to obstruct the pace of social change in the rural sector.

(e) Rural exodus

21. Added to the general problems and obstacles already enumerated, are the special difficulties being created by what has come to be known as the "rural exodus" of the productive sector of the rural population. So long as the rural areas remain neglected and depressed, so long as they are deprived of the necessary infrastructure and amenities for self-generating development and so long as the present disparity is maintained between the townships and the rural areas - in terms of distribution of incomes, physical and social amenities - we should expect the continued one-way traffic flow of the cream of our rural communities into our more developed towns and cities. Since the towns and cities themselves are not adequately equipped to absorb and occupy such huge numbers of rural migrants, we can also expect the urban living and working conditions to deteriorate.

Problems of agricultural development

22. The great significance of agriculture to the West African economies is very obvious. It employs over 75 per cent of the population and produces up to the same percentage of the national wealth of the sub-region. It accounts for more than one-half of the exports from this sub-region. And, since it is the largest sector of the national economy, its development certainly has profound implications on the growth of the economy. If it develops rapidly, the growth rate of the whole economy can be expected to be very high. On the other hand, because of its very heavy weight in the total economy, if it remains stagnant (or expands very slowly), the growth rate for the economy as a whole would remain very low, even if the other sectors were to develop faster.

23. Against such a background, it has been noted that African agricultural output has been slow-growing. The volume of agricultural production (excluding fishing and forestry) was estimated to have increased (over the present decade) at an annual rate of only 2.4 per cent overall, in Africa. Food production grew by only 2 per cent, while non-food production increased by 3.5 per cent per annum. And African agricultural trade with the rest of the world continues to be characterized by a situation in which food imports into Africa are growing more rapidly than exports from Africa. The constraining factors do indeed vary from country to country and from commodity to commodity.

24. However, it has been observed that the main features which distinguish agriculture in this sub-region from those in other parts of Africa are: the high share of the subsistence sector in agricultural output - which is more pronounced in the land-locked countries than in the coastal ones -; the limited scope for application of science and technology to farming methods and techniques; the unsatisfactory utilization of available agricultural land; and the prevalence of human and animal diseases and of pests of crops and livestock. All these pose serious problems to be overcome, since they collectively make it very difficult for adequate utilization of available land resources.

25. Other problems of agricultural development were identified by the Moshi Conference. The conference considered that the inequitable distribution of land in many African countries, the disadvantages involved in landlord - tenant relations and the lack of any definite or permanent entitlement to land holding constituted a major factor in perpetrating the subsistence peasant economy. They provide little or no incentive for land conservation and improvement. On the other hand, the conference observed that new problems were being created by certain agrarian reform measures: for example, the size of the re-distributed land in some countries has not made for economic viability; holdings in certain cases are generally too small to offer adequate employment opportunities for growing families; drains and canals which were previously owned by landlords who had the means to operate them are now owned by a large number of poor shareholders; and programmes of land reform have been carried out, in some cases, at the price of a decrease in productivity, since smaller holdings have created problems of large investments required for mechanized farming and modern techniques. Some systems of land tenure in Africa have, in another way, acted as an obstacle to the proper expansion of credit institutions, because of the confusion often created by titles or deeds of ownership in a system that invests ownership of property in a group rather than in the individual.

26. Improved agricultural production techniques require suitable land tenure arrangements. Improvement of land tenure and usage systems can play a multiple role in promoting rural development and progress. It can provide the means of achieving rural welfare objective, through re-distribution of income; it can provide the necessary security and inducement which are essential to increased production; and it can make it possible for other essential developmental activities aimed at welfare of rural communities to establish and function effectively.

27. In most countries of the sub-region, agricultural development has tended to be problematic, mainly on account of social institutional factors. Experience has amply shown that the technical requirements for increasing productivity are generally well-known. Much is known, for example, about the control of major plant and animal pests and diseases, and the better results to be achieved by the use of improved tools, seed, livestock, etc. But what has proved to be more difficult is how to ascertain the acceptance of such technical improvements by traditionally-minded farmers and rural communities.

28. At the 5th FAO Regional Conference for Africa which took place in Kampala in November 1960, it was accepted without question that there are certain weaknesses in present rural institutions in African countries which act as a major obstacle to future progress in agriculture - especially in the domestic food production sector:

- (a) At one extreme, our traditional agriculture system has not changed much from the past and is not much affected by the efforts of governments to modernise, through various programmes.
- (b) At the other extreme, modern plants and European style farms have occurred as intrusions into the older African traditional patterns. This modern sector produces much of the volume of the agricultural production, but is super-imposed upon by an alien institutional framework, which, from our social, cultural and political viewpoints may not prove to be suitable for the needs of the future.
- (c) Between these two extremes, a number of transitional forms of production and rural living has evolved as variants on both the traditional and agrarian systems.

29. Lack of co-ordination. The Agricultural and Co-operative Ministries, the Agricultural Development Corporations, Marketing Boards, and the Rural Community Development Services in the English-speaking countries - as well as the animation rurale and the intensive production support programmes, provided by Development Corporations in the French-speaking areas - are all organized as vertically streamlined controlled units. They are often not well co-ordinated with other parallel rural development units in the field. Even if they reach the community level, they do not mesh well with each other and with the extension services of education, health, nutrition, etc.

30. This failure to co-ordinate the various programmes reaching the community level, coupled with the tendency often to spread available services too thinly has led to the general situation where the average farm producer does not have access to either the proper combination or quality of institutional facilities and services, which he must have in order to increase his production and income as rapidly as the needs of the country dictate.

#### Nutrition and rural health

31. Improvement of nutrition is of paramount importance for the economic and social development of Africa. In this regard, nutrition education is vital to any programme of rural development. For those engaged in cash crop production, rising incomes will not necessarily be accompanied by a corresponding improvement in the level of food consumption and nutrition, unless proper education and extension programmes are established.

32. Food storage methods in most African rural areas are still primitive, resulting in heavy seasonable losses in farm yields. The suggestion has been made that, "to enable rural production to meet the increasing demands from urban centres, not only should measures be taken to stimulate increased productivity per farmer, but also to make use of practicable but inexpensive storage devices to prepare what has been produced, for a more even distribution of supplies throughout the year".<sup>1/</sup>

33. Although the health standard in Africa is improving, as reflected in the declining death rate, major health problems still exist in the rural areas. The rural areas are still characterised by inadequate health facilities, insanitary conditions and practices, and the prevalence of communicable diseases and malnutrition.

34. In order that public health should make a maximum contribution to integrated rural development, public health programmes should be planned in direct relation to the anticipated material benefits and advancement accruing from other activities in the rural programme. There is also the need to integrate elements of planned population growth, particularly through the services for maternal and child health.

<sup>1/</sup> UN Report on the World Social Situation, page 130

Rural manpower resources

35. Education (both formal and out-of-school) has come to be recognized as the key-stone of any realistic rural development programme. Agricultural advance is not possible without the full involvement of the younger generation, the woman and the adult farmer, in order to enable the rural family as a whole to work effectively in improving the rural environment, productivity and ultimately their own welfare.

36. The present lack of systematic preparation of rural manpower for the task of higher productivity is a very serious constraint on the efforts of African Governments to accelerate rural development. This and other social constraints already discussed in this paper continue to affect the motivation of rural producers; and they also continue to maintain the strict vicious circle - of subsistence economy, ignorance, poverty, disease, lack of appropriate skills and low level of production - which has plagued administrators of rural development programmes for many years.

37. Within the context of rural development, education and training should necessarily imply the inculcation of particular attitudes, in work and living conditions, which directly raise productivity and efficiency in labour utilization, as well as facilitate the necessary institutional reforms. This being the case, I like to pose the question to you, as to which strategy is immediately beneficial to African Governments: (a) whether to continue investing so much of their limited national income almost exclusively into formal classroom education of the young or (b) whether to re-adjust the situation and adopt investment criteria for human resources development which give equal attention to the education and training of the available workforce for national development.

38. It has been suggested in some quarters that, since the basic conditions of Developing Africa are far different and less favourable than those of the developed countries, a strategy of a determined effort to educate adults would stand a better chance of succeeding, than a strategy of exaggerated investment in the slow process of exposing successive generations of school children to new ideas, attitudes and skills. And, since irrational attitudes, as well as ignorance and lack of skills among the adult population, tend to thwart efforts to teach the young, adult education could also have an additional instrumental value, as a means of increasing the effectiveness of child education.

39. In this regard, I should like to invite your serious attention to the very important role which African women, particularly in the East, Central and West African sub-regions, play in the rural economy. In a recent ECA study of "The Status and Role of Women in East Africa", the Consultant (Mrs. Helen Judd) was able to summarize the situation as follows:

"The traditional occupation of women in East Africa has been agriculture; this remains true even today. The majority of women who work are concerned with the production of food for subsistence. It is difficult work because technical aids are unavailable. Women must carry water and firewood for long distances ... and they must make long trips to markets to sell their produce .... Producing for sale and producing in greater quantity are hampered by the difficulties in marketing. Roads are few and poor, transportation facilities limited - usually limited to the woman's back or head - and markets are often far away."<sup>1/</sup>

40. Although it is not wise to generalize, even for the West African countries, we must all be aware of the tremendous role which both our urban and rural women play in sowing, weeding, harvesting, processing of agricultural and fishing products, transportation and marketing. Their work is not made any easier by the fact that they have to do the house-keeping, the raising and the feeding of the family, as well as attend to local social and civic obligations. And their work is certainly not made easier if, in the planning processes for agricultural expansion and in the provision of credit, marketing and co-operative facilities, the governmental authorities extend practically no help to them.

41. In a very recently published book, by Mrs. Ester Boserup,<sup>2/</sup> a most interesting analysis is made of the division of labour between the sexes in African agriculture, including statistical data relating to work input by women and men in contemporary African agriculture. For example, it is stated that the percentage of women in family labour force in agriculture in Senegal is 53; in The Gambia, it is 52; in Congo (B.) and Nigeria, it is 57; and in the Cameroon, it is as high as 62 per cent. And it has been observed that "the joint result of women's high rate of participation in agricultural work and their generally long working hours was that women, in nearly all the cases recorded, were found to do more

<sup>1/</sup> UN Publication: The Status and Role of Women in East Africa (67.II.K.17), pages 19-20.

<sup>2/</sup> Women's Role in Economic Development, (1970).

than half of the agricultural work; in some cases they were found to do around 70 per cent and in one case nearly 80 per cent of the total (agricultural work)." Such important data must not be allowed to be neglected by the planning officials who set the national targets for agricultural production.

42. Already operating in all the West African States are various experiments, policies and measures - including community development, animation rurale, co-operatives and other forms of mutual aid associations - which aim at enlisting and channelling popular support for local and national development and securing fuller participation of broad social groups (including women) in such processes. Your candid assessment of the successes and failures of these institutional measures would be helpful.

#### Organizational and administrative problems

43. By now, it must be very obvious that the conventional approach to rural development, based on unilateral and unco-ordinated attempts at Agricultural Extension, Health and Nutrition Extension, Functional Literacy, Community Development, Rural Co-operatives, etc., is not adequate for grappling with the problems encountered in African rural development. The so-called conventional approach has, without doubt, landed our Governments in serious organizational and administrative problems - involving duplication of efforts and waste of public expenditures; involving unilateral approaches to the creation of new types of rural institutions; and giving rise to jealousies and unwholesome competition among the functional agencies of government. And, as rightly observed by the Africa Regional Inter-Agency Committee on Rural Development:

"Several ministries or agencies are simultaneously involved in various aspects of rural development and extension services but their activities are seldom co-ordinated. Each service or project is usually implemented under the exclusive responsibility of one ministry and is insufficiently co-ordinated with other areas of activity which fall within the competence of the other ministries. Thus, the ministries of Community Development have had exclusive responsibility for a network of services at the village level which they claim are capable of developing the rural community, (but which are seldom utilized by other ministries). The Ministries of Agriculture, Education and Health have

likewise made exclusive claims for their respective extension services in agriculture, in rural education and in rural health. And the lives of the rural communities have been rudely compartmentalized in order to prepare them to receive these services projected separately from the service Headquarters. Government's requests to international agencies, for technical assistance projects, seldom deal with more than the specific sector with which the request is concerned. Consequently, insufficient data is given on the status of aspects of the project which fall under the other sectors, but which are essential to the success of the requested project.<sup>1/</sup>

44. It is against this background - and much more, of which you are more intimately aware than I - that we should examine the rural development objectives of the respective national development plans of the member States of this sub-region. It is also against this same background that we should endeavour, during the coming week, to assess the performance of our national rural development programmes and to suggest concrete forms of action including new institutional arrangements and possible pilot projects which can be undertaken with the assistance of the United Nations system.

1/ "Guiding Principles and a Strategy for an Integrated Approach to Rural Development in Africa" ECA Document E/CN.14/422. page 5.