

RULES, COLLECTIVE GOODS AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Among laws controlling human societies there is one more precise and clearer, it seems to me, than all the others. If men are to remain civilized or to become civilized, the art of association must develop and improve among them at the same speed as equality of conditions spreads.

-Alexis de Tocqueville

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ABSTRACT

A decade after its adoption by major aid donors, the "rural development" strategy does not appear to have significantly or positively affected Third World economic growth. While some may therefore reject the theory behind this strategy, the problem may lie instead in its incomplete implementation. Specifically, the holistic view of economic development standing behind rural development theory emphasizes reconstructing rural society, including rural decision-making and action institutions. "Public choice" theory, though generally applied in industrial societies, helps explain why this aspect of rural development theory is crucial, showing how much of the collective behavior necessary for rural development faces a classic "collective goods" problem. Nationally-based and hierarchical institutions have proven inadequate to resolve this collective goods problem. Local rule adopting institutions have a variety of advantages relative to national institutions, including the potential to spawn: local political entrepreneurship to build coalitions and manipulate side-payments and information; and more and more flexible administrative units to subdivide collective goods into divisible goals and to, fine-tune collective goods to meet local conditions.

INTRODUCTION

Twelve years ago, the United States Congress turned international development assistance theory on its head. The "New Directions" mandate required American foreign aid to reach rural dwellers with basic services, encourage small scale agriculture, fund basic education, and support client states efforts in population planning. Hitherto, American development efforts had focused on building the infrastructure for industry: dams, harbors, power facilities, heavy roads, farm machinery and advanced education.¹

Even if the congressional mandate surprised the international assistance community as a whole, there were members of it who had been rethinking development strategy for several years. Edgar Owens and Robert Shaw, for example, each one time USAID (United States Agency for International Development) officers, published Development Reconsidered in 1971. There they argued that genuine, sustainable, far-reaching and equitable economic development had to begin with small-farmer agriculture. The wealth to generate broad national growth, the markets to support national industries, and the resources to feed these industries, they argued, had to begin where the majority of Third World dwellers lived and worked: in rural agriculture. This sector was not the anchor that slowed national growth, but the major repository of the Third World's productive capacity. Ignored and exploited by urban-centered pricing and disadvantageous terms of international trade, weakened by its own institutional poverty, it would stagnate. Cultivated, it would flourish and lead national growth.²

Since 1973, USAID, the World Bank and most other major, international donors have designed projects and development programs explicitly aimed at rural development. Yet there are few political leaders or assistance bureaucrats satisfied with the result. Indeed, most studies find a deepening crisis in the Third World, and feel little progress has been made by a decade of rural development projects.³

Regardless of development strategies, the Third World would probably have been seriously disappointed the past ten years. Industrial world inflation and recession, exploding energy prices, heavy debt burden, and declining commodity prices have each, in their turn, buffeted Third World economies.

Still, some isolated rural progress should have been visible. One must begin to wonder if the rural development strategy was simply an error. That perspective, however, may grow from an incomplete understanding of the strategy. Owens and Shaw argued that an almost revolutionary change in the rural-urban relationship had to occur, one that included economic and institutional dimensions. While their economic concerns have received some attention, their reasoning on the institutional or organizational level has largely been ignored.⁴

It is the purpose of this paper to explain why those institutional and organizational concerns are absolutely critical to rural development. Ignorance or abandonment of the institutional dimension will slow and perhaps defeat rural development strategies entirely. To explain this point, the paper will apply to rural development a body of theory applied primarily in

the industrial democracies: public choice theory.⁵

This paper argues that several features of development in rural areas can usefully be regarded as collective or public goods, and that the rural development strategy of the last decade has foundered on its inability to solve public choice problems: to translate individual self-interests into collective action. The paper argues that rural development strategies require investment, self-restraint, and risk-taking, all areas where public goods problems abound, and that the emphasis by donors and Third World governments on central governments as the primary agents of the process has placed insurmountable handicaps before achieving such collective action. Local political leadership and local administration, acting as rule adopting and implementing structures, it argues avoid by now well-known weaknesses of national governments and their bureaucracies while they bring certain genuine advantages in achieving local collective interests. These include the advantages growing from size and proximity in identifying free riders, mobilizing social pressure behind locally defined rules, using selective incentives, and pressuring common pool resource violators. Local politics provides an arena to spawn leadership specialized in working with the public whose collective action is required for local rural development projects. Such leaders or "political entrepreneurs" are needed to generate and manipulate information, to build and draw on trust, and to integrate an often differentiated but functionally interdependent community. They are needed to help individuals translate limited and uncertain information into calculi which achieve collective goods. This paper, then, offers two major points:

-rural development in the Third World is a process for which public choice theory has substantial predictive and explanatory power; and,

-this theory, when applied to the issues of Third World rural development, suggests there must be a substantial strengthening of local political leaders and local rule making and rule implementing institutions.

PUBLIC CHOICE THEORY

Public choice theory deals with the problem of "public goods." Goods which a producer cannot "ration" or "market" and are therefore freely available to all consumers if provided to any, are considered to be "public goods." For example, if national defense or clean air are supplied at all they cannot be denied any inhabitants of a geographic area: if present for some, they are available to all. In response to this uncontrolled availability, a rational man postulate would predict that each person, wishing to maximize his income and minimize his expenses, would consume such available goods, but not volunteer to share their expense. He would be a "free rider." Under these circumstances, of course, funding to continue provision of the good is problematic. This pattern is intensified whenever the public good under question has a high fixed cost: were the fixed cost lower, a single consumer or a small group might be willing to pay the cost because of the value he or they would consume, notwithstanding the fact that others would consume it as well. As many key improvements needed for Third World development cannot be "rationed" and do indeed have such a high fixed cost, investment in them is limited.

In these cases, individual behavior varies according to whether one belongs to a cohesive group: a group which can use some sanction or incentive to enforce or ensure individual compliance with collective behavior or to privatize the benefits or costs of certain individual behaviors.⁶ The value of public choice theory is that it explains why behavior which is rational for a person acting as a member of a cohesive group is equally irrational for that same person as a free individual. Thus, the public choice approach helps explain why some behaviors and goods are produced in quantity under certain organizational structures, and not produced at all under others. More importantly, it shows why this outcome is in itself rational, and suggests how this pattern may be changed. The next section of this paper will argue that several key elements of rural development are systematically underproduced in the Third World, and not simply rather because of inadequate wealth. Because of the disjunction between individual and collective rationality, and the absence of institutions through which groups can translate the former into the latter, goods crucial for development are underprovided, or not provided at all.

DEVELOPMENT AND THE RATIONAL INDIVIDUAL

There is little debate that infrastructure, the efficient use and conservation of natural resources, and technical innovation in agriculture are important in Third World rural development. Yet each is in scarce supply. Public choice theory helps explain why:

Infrastructure: Roads, bridges, irrigation channels, fences, safe water supplies, tube wells, market facilities, community centers, elementary schools, vocational training facilities, catchment dams to control erosion,

etc.: most agree that this list of capital investment is necessary for rural development. The Economist wrote, the "principal problem for half of the world is how to organize rural labor for the construction of necessary local infrastructure such as fences, ditches, roads and irrigation works." But these goods are effectively public or collective goods. Even where in theory some could be "rationed" through a market system, the absence of rural capital and ineffective systems of private property make these goods de facto public goods: Collective, volunteer labor is often necessary for their production; the capital and cash flow necessary to operate them as rationed or market goods is usually unavailable; and, traditions of common landholding or ambiguities in land tenure mean theoretically private goods are in reality at least "semi"-public goods.⁶ Thus, once produced, the benefits of the good may be shared in some measure by many dwellers in the relevant area. Under these circumstances, where is the incentive for an individual voluntarily to bear the cost? Fixed costs are also generally prohibitively high, which intensifies the problem of their production. Government ministries and international donors on the other hand, are visible exhorting and promising to bring development. The rational peasant, one might expect will wait for them to pay the costs, the very outcome predicted by public choice theory.

Resource Conservation and Common Pool Goods: Forests, fishery resources, water, topsoil, grazing lands, often appear to be in endless supply. Individual consumers look at the forests of the Amazon, the grazing lands of the Sahel (the arable land lying between the Sahara desert and the farming lands of West Africa), woodlots, fish resources throughout the world as pools of resources where no individual's behavior alone could affect continued supply. Resource conservation, in these situations faces dynamics

which parallel public goods. For no single individual has a compelling reason to reduce consumption: after all, if he sacrifices for the collectivity, but no one else does, it will make no difference to the supply in either the long or short run. However, in the short run he will be poorer; perhaps he will starve. Social costs and personal costs are disjunctive, and few cases can be cited where either markets or governments have been effective in connecting the two.⁹

Overconsumption (beyond replacement levels) of such goods as tropical forests, grazing lands, woodlots and topsoil is in itself of legitimate concern. Beyond the loss of the specific resource, however, is the problem of broader environmental degradation: as grazing lands are stripped, water-retention drops, erosion occurs, and marginal lands become deserts. As tropical forests are cut, thin topsoils erode, and flooding occurs. As woodlots are cut, wind erosion worsens, land degrades, water runoff increases, etc. The very basis of rural life is threatened by the "tragedy of the commons".¹⁰ Yet, for the individual actor pursuing his self interest, his individual abstention from resource consumption is at best a speedier suicide than is the prospect of long term resource exhaustion. As the costs of conservation are fairly high, the "consumer" tries to externalize his costs to others who will resist bearing them if they can. Perceiving the good from its immediate market value rather than from its longer term replacement value, he will oppose efforts toward conservation, probably to a level too low to protect the good.

Technical Innovation: The rational, individual peasant is usually not concerned only with expanding his crops. He is also concerned, some argue primarily concerned, with security. A seemingly irrational/inefficient

system of scattered plots helps protect him from total crop failure. Similarly, his-"social security" system lies in the social relationships he has nurtured and responds to throughout the year. The decision to attend a funeral celebration in a neighboring village for two or three days during a key phase of the crop cycle may cost him some production, but it maintains his secure membership in a system of social and political relationships that are his security in times of crop failure, personal injury, or family crisis. Equally, conspicuous success can cause hostility, exclusion from valued social relationships, even violence. So the peasant is interested in more than making his own "Green revolution."¹¹

Still, he is not without interest in higher income. The problem is that-most official programs of technological innovation suffer from three key failings:

- they fail to comprehend the non-economic demands on the peasant farmer's life, and may therefore expect higher labor intensity than will be forthcoming;

- they fail to comprehend the risk they ask peasants to take in order to pay for unknown and costly inputs (seed and fertilizer) which may place the peasant in real danger of penury should the crops fail;

- .and, they fail to understand that they face a "market for lemons" cost picture, where the uncertain and unreliable performance of government programs in the past leads rational peasants to devalue the claims and inflate the costs of all new programs in the present.¹² For this very sensible reason alone, peasant innovation in agriculture would be slow. The rational peasant would wait for others to bear the risk, for others to experiment with the social system, for others to deal with an unreliable government. Once others have proven one can survive and prosper with

technical change, the rational peasant will then change his farming practices. -Let others bear the risks, since they seem so high. Agricultural production, embedded as it is in the entire life of the community, will not respond to market and technological strategies which assume rational and atomized producers.

Because of these factors, government attempts to expand agricultural production are received skeptically if at all. The many outsiders who hold the view that Third World peasants are "traditional" and blind to economic incentive miss the key point. The peasants are reluctant to take risks because the cost versus the benefit, particularly when prior government performance is considered, are very disadvantageous. Why should they bear excessive potential economic and social costs for very uncertain benefits?13 If everyone reasons similarly, of course, innovation will not occur. Given the above logic, initial field innovations may require community-wide involvement in bearing costs and sharing benefits.

This section has argued that the principles of microeconomics as applied by public choice theory help explain why several, generally agreed on, key aspects of Third World development will generally be undersupplied. Infrastructure, optimal use and conservation of natural resources, and agricultural innovation, are limited by the rational behavior of individuals under current institutional conditions. The remainder of this paper will explore why, and suggest how these conditions might be changed.

COLLECTIVE ACTION, RULES AND DEVELOPMENT

One can look at the problem of underdevelopment at least from two levels. From the local perspective, development can be viewed in general as

a kind of "public good." Development as the sum total of economic modernization, institutional growth, education, etc., fits a key characteristic of the public good: once it is here, all will share in it, regardless of who pays; therefore the rational person will pay as little as possible. The problem is this is precisely the characteristic which leads to free riding and underinvestment in collective goods (and underrestraint in consumption from common pools). Thus, local development as a general goal or idea would not energize individuals, but enervate them: they, following their self-interest, would wait for others to pay for or bring "development." As central government is in most cases the only viable government institution, and most discusses and espouses development, the rational rural dweller would wait for it to deliver development. In fact, rural development everywhere is nearly stagnant, and there is overwhelming evidence that local communities are weak if not feeble partners in development projects; both conditions are consistent with this theory."

Of course, and at a more specific level as we have seen above, the logic also obtains. Whether it be a dam, a bridge, a woodlot or improved agricultural technology, rational rural dwellers would not provide these public goods alone. They would wait for others to pay for them, seeking to minimize their expenditures and/or risk, and maximize their own returns and usage. Whether the issue is looked at the macro or micro level, key goods for development will be underprovided.

Public choice theory and welfare economics point emphatically to the solution: public goods can be provided when individuals in groups bind themselves together to behave collectively through the use of rules. Such rules can take a variety of forms and have a variety of origins. They

include private contracts with third parties as enforcers; social customs undergirded by social pressure or sacred sanctions; professional "norms" sanctioned by membership in exclusive associations; rules within voluntary, associations using membership as a sanction; rules defined by sovereign bodies for the members and backed by legal coercion; rules entered into by sovereign bodies, and others.¹⁵

Since independence, the bulk of Third World governments have sought to make rules through centralized authority and through formal law. This law has been defined virtually exclusively by unitary governments, has emphasized administrative decision processes such as national planning which have limited input, and been enforced primarily through centralized, hierarchical, and professionalized bureaucracies. In theory, such a system of sovereign rules is among the most compelling. Yet by most yardsticks, Third World rural development has stagnated.¹⁶ As this paper has argued, this has been in part because of the inability of Third World Governments to surmount the collective goods problem. Why have they failed?

Like all rules, of course, a law is not a social reality because it is simply a "law". First, it must effectively sanction non-compliance (and/or reward compliance) and be know to do so. Second, as a tool of social policy seeking support because of agreed upon ends, it must work; it must be based on sound reasoning and be adaptable and adapted to varying conditions as they affect its soundness. The second observation is simply to note that the "if...then" logic expressed by a rule must be sound if it is to achieve the desired social outcome; and that as varying contextual and environmental factors affect the original hypothesis, they must be taken into account in its administration. Neither of these observations are profound, but each

has profound implications for the bulk of Third World governments' development efforts.

First, since all rules are problematic individuals are uncertain as to the probability that sanction or reward will actually be coupled with rules. "Policemen" are never everywhere and bureaucracies always operate with some error. Individuals can never be certain of the behavior of others regarding any single rule. All of these can be reasons to ignore or evade rules.¹⁷

As numerous analysts have observed, the reliability and reach of Third World bureaucracies in rural areas is dismal. Lacking certitude about rules, individuals make guesses as to their personal interests, and often choose to evade or ignore those rules. This is particularly a problem for compliance where individuals have a financial interest in evading rules: in free-riding, in exploiting common-pool resources, and in evading uncertain technical innovations. Centralized authorities and hierarchical bureaucracies have, by their own deliberate policy, concentrated rule-making and enforcement powers in their own hands. Thus, as their "reach" fell short of the rural areas, gaps in "rules", appeared.¹⁸ One is left with an unanswered question: how are individuals to be persuaded or to persuade themselves to set and follow rules for collective goods?

As noted above the second problem associated with making rules effective is their credibility and record as effective social policy. If one assumes societies are extremely complex, and composed of multiple systems of human interaction, social engineering must be sophisticated and adaptable to succeed.¹⁹ For any single group of actors to attempt to define and adapt the plethora of rules needed by societies pursuing dramatic

economic and social transformation is to take on an immense, perhaps impossible task. For, programs and rules which effectively address a variety of ecological, economic, social and political problems and resources are necessary for rural development. In any country, natural resources and infrastructure may range from plentiful to non-existent; localities vary dramatically in income, number of landless, and extent of land pressure; local political institutions may be moribund, vital or mixed; and experience with centrally based programs in the past may have colored a locality's orientation toward new "development" programs from open to hostile.²⁰

The basic problem when rule making is centralized, is that the scale of activity is so large and the cost of analysis and differentiation among such local characteristics is so high that a flexible strategy utilizing a variety of tactics has not been possible. Centralized rule making has generally required categorization, systematization and routinization. All these, particularly in programs which attempt broad (geographic), and deep (distance from headquarters) coverage, have been biases toward inflexibility. Selective incentives and flexible implementation are difficult to devise and maintain in such a system. Indeed, the irony is that the same dynamics of distance, space and uncertainty which make flexibility imperative have tended to make officials seek greater hierarchical control, and lead to less flexible organizations.²¹

Similar problems bedevil centralization of rule implementation. Requirements that decisions be referred up lengthy chains and the tendency for national offices to be clogged with such requests have slowed intolerably actions by central bureaucracies in developing countries. This is particularly troublesome when bureaucracies are working in conditions of

great uncertainty, when information costs are high, when technological under-development makes information leakage high, and when national policies and funding are always uncertain. Bureaucrats as centralized rule makers are caught in a double bind: because of these factors, field personnel are reluctant to commit themselves without headquarter's support; and headquarter's personnel often cannot adequately evaluate proposed actions with the information they do have. Either way, incentives delayed can mean programs lost. This is particularly burdensome when some local support has existed; for those who take risks learn to avoid them in the future. If local leaders support projects and rules which are disputed or found to be fictitious, their current stock of influence is diminished and their inclination and ability to support programs again in the future decline proportionately.²²

We conclude this section with a dilemma: rules are crucial to Third World development; yet the concentrated power of the centralized state has failed to bring rules to rural development. Is there any solution?

RULES, RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

So far this paper has argued that public choice theory is useful in understanding the slow pace of rural development in the Third World. It has argued, furthermore, that attempting to define and implement rules at and from only one level in a political system makes difficult the two challenges of making those rules real and making them effective. The remainder of this page will argue that vastly strengthened grass-roots political leadership and more flexible and locally-oriented administrative structures are necessary before the two challenges to rules can be met.

POLITICS, LOCAL LEADERSHIP, AND MAKING RULES REAL:

When rules cannot be enforced by agents whose political base is secure outside the rule-receiving community then the rural populace becomes the only remaining source of rules and their enforcement. Where this is the case, as it often is in the rural third world, rule definition and implementation require some measure of local integration around general goals, specific actions and follow-ups. What issues and problems are generally felt and agreed to among rural dwellers, what can be done in general about them, what are local persons willing and able to agree on, what specific actions flow from those agreements, who is to supervise them," who is to care for funds, and who is to see to the operation and maintenance of a subsequent facility?

Even the stereotypically "simple" rural community is composed of differentiated groups: generations, ethnic groups, farmers and herders, those with access to irrigation and those without, those with better and those with poorer land, wage earners, merchants, and so forth. Various public goods will certainly have differing value to them. Conflict may have occurred among them in the past. Still cooperation among them and among those who value goods differently will probably be necessary to provide the goods. For that to occur diverse persons and groups must be integrated and coalitions must be built. Someone must lead this process.

Literature both on American community development and development in the third world illustrates the role local political leadership can play here. Perhaps the classic theoretical statement is that based on Mayor Richard Lee of New Haven, Connecticut.²³ helped connect a vague sense of

discontent with a stagnating urban infrastructure and economy into a coordinated and widespread effort to redevelop New Haven. He brokered agreements among interdependent but uncoordinated groups, surmounting differences in class, ethnicity and style. He did this by developing a cybernate system to gather, interpret and manipulate information, personally coordinating all phases of the development program, building and drawing on personal trust to carry support over lean times, convincing disparate persons that their felt wants would be met by his emerging program (and mobilizing appropriate wants in other apathetic persons), and allowing his visibility and reputation to be a "hostage" guaranteeing people's investment during the program's early stages.²⁴

New Haven is, of course, a remarkable case in an environment rather different from the rural third world. Nonetheless, diverse literature on third world rural and small-town politics illustrates similar needs for community integration, and similar functions performed through local political leadership.²⁵ Audrey Smock's analysis of politics in the Eastern Region of Nigeria during the early 1960's is an excellent example.²⁶ There, particularly in the town of Abiriba, Ibo ethnic unions became de facto governmental units, providing many of the services commonly associated with local government. The Abiriba Communal Improvement Union (ACIU), for example, was the major development actor in that area, financing and building the local hospital, the local tarred roads, the elementary school, a improved market, and the secondary school. The last it staffed and operated as well.²⁷

As Smock emphasizes, both the unions and the formal local governments lacked effective sanctions to enforce their decisions." But the unions carried enough local legitimacy that they could effectively

enforce rules thoroughly such weapons as "...humiliation, embarrassment, communal disapproval, and ultimately ostracism."²⁸ The unions, particularly the AICU had constructed this power, in Smock's judgement, because it had become the accepted local definer of each persons, "civic duties." Operationally, "The willingness of the community to make sacrifices and divert funds from private use, such as business investment or consumption, derived from the sense of legitimacy accorded to the unions as the embodiment of the unity of the community."²⁹

In a detailed analysis of the AICU's operations and activities, Smock depicts an organization whose leadership carefully pooled information from disparate sources, organized annual conferences to ratify decisions, carefully built coalitions around projects, selected goals and programs which often directly supported local traditions, and overall promoted values "emphasizing communal obligations, which were accepted by the community."³⁰ The AICU also helped settle local disputes, facilitated grass-roots participation, rewarded its leaders with prestige and influence, and expelled those leaders who had disappointed the members: "The irreverant manner in which some political leaders were unceremoniously expelled underscored the fact that skills on the part of the leaders, not the awe of the followers, kept them in office."³¹

Union leaders were held to a higher standard of honesty than other political actors: "The same people who at least passively countenance corruption in local councils were scandalized by hints of irregularities in ethnic union accounts."³² The unions, Smock concludes, were vehicles which allowed leaders, "...who were capable of mobilizing members for community development," to emerge.³³ "Ethnic unions, unlike official governmental

bodies, were able to inspire self-sacrifice and thus divert resources from consumption to community development... The Abiriban model comprises a testimonial to the benefits of decentralization and to the potential which for rapid development which once existed in Eastern Nigeria."³⁴

While the Smock research is more comprehensive and focused on questions of local politics, leadership and local development, other work corroborates her findings.

Maxwell Owusu, in Uses and Abuses of Political Power, analyzed community integration in Swedru, Ghana, a multi-ethnic town undergoing rapid ethnic and economic change. There he found, "a very important element (was) the role of the chief as a person (with a personality), in contradistinction to his office, as an integrative force..."³⁵ Owusu stressed the chief's personal role in mediating among the various ethnic groups, and between those in traditional economic roles and the newer, commercial classes. The chief artfully drew on his personal inter-ethnic experience, his linguistic abilities, his ambiguous ethnic background, and his official position to recognize and honor notable migrants to Swedru, to build deep personal trust and loyalty to him across the formerly clashing ethnic groups. Owusu suggests it was in part explicit personal loyalty felt by the diversity of Swedru's residents which integrated the community's social and political life.³⁶

David Parkin found similar interethnic integrative functions performed by local leaders crucial to collective action by a residential tenants association in Kampala East, Uganda.³⁷ Abner Cohen concluded community-wide integrative functions were performed by Malams (religious

leaders) among the Hausa in Ibaden, Nigeria.³⁸ Malams acted together, pooling the diverse information they gathered filling their religious functions, to develop general social and policies in the interests of "the quarter as whole, and the network of Hausa communities in Yourbaland."³⁹ (Southern Nigeria) The integrative role played by Hausa leaders was sufficiently powerful, in Cohen's analysis, that it effectively protected a Hausa monopoly over the lucrative north-south trade in beef.⁴⁰

Insofar as multiple ethnicity characterizes the third world, Marc Ross, in his analysis of politics in Nairobi, turns one's attention again to the role of political leaders. There he found the "modernization" hypothesis which suggests education and urban life will reduce ethnic pluralism and lead to greater social integration, was confounded by the evidence. Rather, he saw ethnic pluralism sustained and often stimulated by economic change and inter-ethnic contact.⁴¹ This led, in turn, to greater demands on political leaders, demands which they were ineffective in satisfying in part because of their weakness as integrative actors. The outcome, in Ross' analysis, was an increase in political cynicism and alienation.⁴²

Generalizing from his analysis of peasant behavior in Southeast Asia, Samuel Popkin believed there were several ways in which political entrepreneurs could define local needs and goals, and help persuade rural dwellers to choose collective action. He believed local leaders could generate and interpret information to persuade peasants that each person's contribution was necessary to produce a collective good. Individuals could be persuaded that each person's contribution was necessary to elicit others' support. Leaders also could break the collective good into many smaller

pieces, where each person's contribution could be linked to an identifiable product, which in turn could lead to the final product. Of course, when individuals had chosen to contribute for altruistic or ethical reasons, a credible leader would still be needed to persuade them of the efficacy of contributing through a given structure."

In a world of limited and uncertain information, individuals must make guesses as to the likelihood of behavior being sanctioned or rewarded, and even as to the value to them of specific public goods. Those guesses are complicated by how widely problem and policy areas vary: in scale, in cost, in input, in technology, and of the members and preferences of other people involved. Under such uncertainty, persuasive leadership to help translate problems into policies is essential. Leaders are necessary to gather, interpret and manipulate information, to distill local discontents into specific wants, to crystalize and generalize goals, to coordinate activities, to legitimize bargains, to reward others who take leading roles, to use their reputations as a public "hostages" for funds, to use trust built by them to sustain projects over trying times, and to use their reputation for success to persuade fence-sitters to join in.

Leadership is not free. In a real world of scarce resources and pressing needs, politics must be understood to be a vocation like all others: it must attract novices, train apprentices, sustain journeymen and reward its master craftsmen. When it does not offer structures through which professionals can do their work and reward practitioners, it will die.⁴⁴

The centralization of political life in much of the Third World has meant there is a death of political vocations (and, indeed, of politics in general!) below the national capital. There remain few legitimate structures below the center in which to practice politics. Simultaneously, the dominance in public life of the expert acting through the national ministry or bureaucracy has shrunk further the scope of grass-roots politics and the resources and opportunities available to sustain the political generalists. 45

A revitalization of sub-national political life is necessary before these political professionals can develop and can fulfill the functions discussed above. Novices need to be trained, and those without talent, ethics or good sense need to fail (and be seen to have failed). Similarly, those with talent need a structure which rewards and protects them from the powerful, sometimes well-intended, but often oblique politics of the center, the bureaucracies, and the experts. When local agreements and rules need to be legitimized and many individuals must adopt changed behaviors, such external forces can disrupt, distort and corrupt the local leaders effectiveness in managing conflict and defining and achieving collective purposes. In summary, local leaders must be trained, sustained and insulated; and it is at least arguable that independent, subnational political processes and institutions appear to be required for those things to occur.⁴⁶

Administration and Making Rules Effective; Let us assume a coalition has been built and individuals have been persuaded it is in their interest not to attempt to ride free. The "public good" can still be lost if individuals find administration of sanctioned programs to be erratic, ineffective or unfair.' Not only must leaders persuade their "constituents" that a program is in their interest, and that it is in their interests not to ride free; its administration must be seen to fit local needs, be seen to sanction behavior equitably, and be seen to work.

In an insightful analysis of the obstacles blocking protection of a common pool resource, wood resources in the Sahel, James T. Thompson shows how crucial effective administration is in protecting, common pool goods, and how poorly national institutions have performed.⁴⁸ Because of the importance of this study it will be cited at length:

Policing is an indispensable start towards management. It demonstrates somebody's direct concern with trees and puts potential violators on notice that they are illegally infringing collective or individual interests in the Woodstock.

State **control** and **policing** of the **Woodstock** to the **exclusion** of all **local** involvement in management is a major weakness of many contemporary Sahelian reforestation schemes. It dissociates policing and harvesting interest: foresters police alone, and everybody else harvests on the sly. Financing now available to Sahelian forestry agencies is insufficient to permit the massive staff increases. Therefore, exclusive state policing as a control system seems doomed to severely suboptimal performance, and sustained-yield woodstock management by such means is unlikely.

Local policing, where trees are collectively owned by local units or held by individuals, appears to offer a useful alternative. However, it must resolve the enforcement problem or witness a return to the working rule governing unregulated common property woodstock exploitation: "cut anywhere but at home."⁴⁹

Individuals may indeed be able to see the value of collective action, but the existing institutional structure may make it impossible. As

Thompson noted:

The Sahelian peasants are often admonished to become aware of environmental degradation. By implication, ignorance or plain stupidity underlie peasants' current failure to take better care of the land and trees that support them. But it is highly unlikely that peasants fail to see the ecological breakdowns occurring around them. They may be aware and concerned, yet simultaneously immobilized by inappropriate rules.⁵⁰

As an alternative, Thompson recommended local institutions:

Village governments or quarter committees could regulate access. Local management units would be empowered to exclude non-residents. By reducing information costs and facilitating the consensus required to maintain a local regulation system, such units might well cut policing and investment costs involved in building collective supply.

Adequate collective management decisions depend on accurate knowledge about who is doing what with the woodstock. Wood must presumably be distributed under some locally acceptable formula which equitably apportions supplies and hardships associated with short supply. Details of distribution formulas appear to be an intimately local matter, defined by each local unit's consensus about what is right and proper. Two general conditions hold, however.

First, such formulas must be enforceable to be effective. If those who run short are permitted to raid the collective woodstock, the now inappropriate first come, first served rule will replace good management.

Second, a formula will only work if it is seen by villagers to achieve equity. Inequitable arrangements will be violated by aggrieved peasants pressed for fuel. Accurate information gathered in ways which local people consider lower information costs will be."

What are the faults of state managed resource control? Insufficient information to attune its program to local needs; no "means of discovering, defining, or building a local consensus behind operating rules; inadequate intelligence to enforce effectively any rules; and insufficient money to put an effective force into the field. This is not unique to Sahelian resource management. In his comprehensive analysis of Third World rural administration, Jon Morris observes:

Again and again the typical failings of field units reveal inadequate organizational intelligence and adaptability in their own operation: rigid adherence to targets long after circumstances have changed, crises which could have been anticipated, spare parts not ordered, a lack of contingency plans, and so forth. 52

As Moris and others analyze the objective characteristic of the Third World environment, the development task, and the organization of resources of Third World national bureaucracies, these problems are perhaps unavoidable. Specifically, they characterize bureaucratic performance as inflexible, delayed, weak in the field, and as biased to urban/external interests.⁵³ These combine to make central bureaucracies ineffective in controlling free-riders through either sanctions or selective incentives, and in altering individual calculations which discourage collective interests.

How might local administration operate better? First, and as discussed by Thomson, local dwellers are more likely to design a better program. They know locally acceptable ground rules, are aware of abuses and free-riders, and are able to fine-tune programs to fit varying local conditions. They can better define equitable (and therefore broadly acceptable) allocations of volunteer administrative responsibility, and can discern early and alter flawed programs and strategies.

Secondly, and perhaps more profoundly, as Thomson emphasizes, a locally based program has greater likelihood of enforcement, as it has greater potential to merge the interests of the administrators or "policers" with the local dwellers. Having agreed locally on a collective task, having designed the program to fit local needs, those charged with enforcing the

collective behavior have a greater incentive to actually enforce it because they will also have the benefits of success. The incentive to obey and to enforce is far stronger than when an external-bureaucrat enforces a program agreed upon far away, in an area he neither knows nor plans to stay in for long.

A third advantage is the increase in institutional capacity which grows from greater flexibility in institutional design. This is explained in a seminal article on American metropolitan government by Vincent Ostrom, et. al. Here is described the flaws of centralized comprehensive government, and is identified a scheme to maintain its virtues while evading those flaws. In this analysis, "Gargantua" bears a striking resemblance to Third World national governments:

Gargantua unquestionably provided an appropriate scale of organization for many huge public services...

However, gargantua with its single dominant center of decision-making, is apt to become a victim of the complexity of its own hierarchical or bureaucratic structure. Its complex channels of communication may make its administration unresponsive to many of the more localized public interests in the community. The costs of maintaining control in gargantua's public service may be so great that its production of public goods becomes grossly inefficient.⁵⁴

The solution is not radical and comprehensive decentralization, for bureaucracy is not the "enemy". Rather, making decisions at levels which do not correspond to their relevant "publics" is the problem:

The multiplicity of interests in public goods sought by people in a metropolitan region can only be handled in the context of many different levels of organization. The polycentric system is confronted with the problem of realizing the needs of wider community interests or publics beyond the functional or territorial bounds of each of the formal entities within the broader metropolitan-region. The single jurisdiction, in turn, confronts the problem of recognizing and organizing the various subsidiary sets of interests within the big system.⁵⁵

Some goods such as flood-control or water basin management must be handled at regional or perhaps national levels. However, Ostrom's thesis is that organizing around the smallest public which can reasonably be expected to afford a public good, can avoid spill-overs and/or internalize externalities, and will maximize individuals and communities' ability to define rules for themselves which can provide the public goods they want and need.

Finally and fourthly, as Mancur Olson has shown, small organizations need to pay lower organization costs, decision costs and information costs. At the same time smaller organizations can utilize informal communications, social cohesion, face-to-face loyalties and social pressure to strengthen themselves.⁵⁶

Diverse empirical research lends credence to these four hypotheses. For example, research on contemporary American urban services has indicated that citizens serviced by smaller bureaucracies are more pleased with those services than they are by public services managed by larger ones.⁵⁷ Freeman and Loudermilk found local authorities essential for effective management of small-scale, tube-well irrigation projects in rural Pakistan.⁵⁸ Thomson, of course, found what little progress had been made in wood-lot management grew from local, not centralized actions. USAID evaluation research on management of small-scale irrigation facilities in the Philippines and Indonesia found local organizations essential for their effective management, and close correlation between scale of project and existing local communities essential to effective organizational performance.⁵⁹

The operational problem, then, for Third World leaders is to adapt scale of organization to the task at hand:

The problem of gargantua, then is to recognize the variety of smaller sets of publics that may exist within its boundaries. Many of the interests of smaller publics might be properly negotiated within the confines of a smaller political community without requiring the attention of centralized decision-makers concerned with the big system. This task of recognizing the smaller publics is a problem of "field" or "area" organization.⁶⁰

In summary, a second way local administration helps surmount the rationality of individualist behavior is by improving the administration of collective projects and policies. As a smaller and locally based organization, it avoids the inflexibility and external orientation which weaken national bureaucracies, operates with lower organization costs, and can better tailor programs to local wants, needs and values. If it can fulfill this potential and increase the likelihood of effective sanction against free-riding and so reduce successful evasion of rules of self-restraint, it can reinforce the influence of local leaders, and viability of local institutions.

The experience of the "Comilla" project is perhaps an instructive example with which to end this section. Akhter ~~Ammed~~ Kahn, project director for many years, observed that "rural anarchy" was the greatest cause of poverty in the area. The inability of peasants to act collectively meant that infrastructure critically needed to control flooding and lengthen the growing season was never provided. It meant that gouging money-lenders kept peasants economically dependent and vulnerable.⁶¹

Emphasizing the development of institutions where shared needs and problems could be discussed, through which resources could be pooled and bargains struck, and through which programs could be implemented and rules enforced, Kahn and the Corailla project made impressive progress in providing infrastructure and systems of cooperative credit. When, several years later, external opposition seriously weakened those rural institutions, infrastructure deteriorated and the credit systems faltered.⁶²

Summary and Conclusions

This paper has argued that much of the persistent rural underdevelopment in the Third World can be understood through public choice theory. By looking at the rational incentive individuals have to maximize their interests as individuals, one can understand why apparently desirable collective behavior does not occur. Third World rural development requires massive rural capital investment, restraint in use of common pool resources, and great risk taking; these are all activities where collective action by the citizens is crucial. Hitherto, that has not occurred. This is because national agents have lacked the funds, the information, the extensive personnel and the legitimacy to regulate and/or coerce the behavior necessary to provide the desired goods. This situation may well be exacerbated by conventional central planning systems and developmental rhetoric: not only does the national government lack the mechanisms to turn individualistic interests to collective action, its preemptive approach to development in general discourages localities from moving onward by themselves: why pay the costs of development as an "individual" community

when there is a national collectivity to provide development at no local cost? The outcome of all this is persistent rural underdevelopment throughout virtually the entire Third World.

This paper has argued a second thesis: that public goods can be produced in the rural Third World through rules defined by local politics and administration. They bring two advantages:

First, local political entrepreneurs and leaders are required to build coalitions and trust, and to persuade, thereby, local dwellers that a project or program will succeed. Through the local leader's access to information, he is in a position to log-roll, make side-payments, time contributions and call for contributions on faith and trust. In each respect, the local leader can use favors and persuasion to replace the uncertainty which surrounds most individuals' decisions regarding collective action. Identifiable and locally selected leaders will also develop reputations for reliability and failure to help preempt the "market of lemons" which currently deflates the value of most nationally led programs. A local political process and the leaders it generates, are necessary to define operating rules.

Second, a large number of flexibly defined, locally oriented administrative units will provide organizations whose scale, operation, decision making, feedback, flexibility and constituency-orientation can be far more efficient and effective than the exclusive use of the national bureaucracies has been. Combined with these administrative advantages are the likelihood that free riders and common pool violators can be identified and pressured more easily by a smaller organization than a larger one: it is

an opportunity to make rules effective.

Through these two advantages, a third may grow. For local government and politics facilitates social learning.⁶³ If rural dwellers can legally take collective action; can tax themselves, hire personnel, let contracts for services, and set an agenda of local tasks, they can learn from their successes and mistakes. Through the experience of local politics, they have an opportunity to learn the benefits and costs of collective action, of their dependence upon each other, of their individual and collective potential: of their enlightened self interest. While they will not always choose wisely, they will make choices, see the results, and have the opportunity to learn and make new choices in the future. It gives them an opportunity to build a polity, something sadly lacking in most of the Third World.⁶⁴

Will local leaders and administrations always operate "better?" Of course they will not. They will be vulnerable to many serious problems. Local elites will gather a disproportionate share of some project benefits. Projects will be started which will be too large or too technically complex for a locality to complete, collapse in local conflicts, waste (in some opinions) scarce capital, and make demands on the central government for recurrent personnel costs it will find difficult to fill. Many of these problems can be prevented by adopting judicial safeguards, mixed responsibility for programs, the use inspectorates-general, and other administrative periphanelia of federalism.

The real failure of rural development strategies hitherto followed is their failure to believe in, organize, energize and institutionalize the

ultimate source of all wealth: the people. It is they who are the real agent of development, and they who must be trusted. Without institutions through which they can establish and enforce rules to pursue their common purposes they will perforce remain passive. That is virtually a tautology. Rural dwellers cannot develop without collective action and they cannot act collectively without institutions with which they can define, structure, and sustain those actions. Paternalism, whether well meaning or venial, renders and perpetuates them as subjects.

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The outcome of all this is that such infrastructure depends on large scale volunteer labor, a situation rife with "free rider" problems. Or, where national-international assistance projects have provided infrastructure such as irrigation systems or rural roads, the overhead cost of rationing the product or charging precise user-fees is prohibitive and such administrative systems are simply not designed into the projects. Some irrigation projects have solved the problem by creating what are effectively local irrigation "authorities" to manage the system and defray costs through tax-like uniform user charges. The problem of maintaining rural roads has yet to be solved. Thus rural road projects have a long history of severe deterioration only a few years after project completion. Thus even goods which would not be true collective goods in a developed economy behave like them in the hinterlands of the poorest LDCs, and require strategies appropriate to these patterns for their provision.

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