

Rural Planning: General

The heading 'rural planning' as a sector of government involvement is often absent from plan documents in many countries. But policy and legislation related to agricultural, transportation and communications, education, health and human services, and social welfare, sectors generally addressed in plans, have had far reaching and profound impacts on the physical conditions of, and infrastructure availability in, rural areas. They have also determined the range and quality of services accessible to rural populations. When headings such as rural planning, rural development, integrated rural development are present in plan documents, as discrete sectors requiring attention and having related funding lines in national and state budgets, these sectors are often defined in terms of engagement with social welfare agendas. The goals of such sectoral policies have often included statements about the need to redress inequalities in access to public services and redistributive justice. A broader definition of rural planning as encompassing policy that has both explicit and implicit intention to impact rural conditions, economic, social, and physical is adopted here.

During the formative period of the United States in the nineteenth century, agriculture production was a central element in its robust growth and development. Similarly, an agriculture-based economy and a predominantly agrarian population was the legacy of heavily populated, newly independent, countries like China and India, which faced the task of nation building in the second half of the twentieth century.

But over the years these countries have differed significantly in their approach to rural planning. The interventions of their governments in the rural sector define a spectrum of strategies and approaches, from total centralized control to indirect, market-driven change. Furthermore, their strategies, which took divergent paths at the start of nation formation, have over time sharply changed direction.

The United States (US), India, and China provide examples of countries that have developed rural planning-related policies based on quite differing ideologies about planning and the role of rural areas in national development. Their positions have ranged from the free market, laissez faire orientation typical of 'First World' countries like the US to policies of 'Second World' countries like China that adopted a centralized, cooperatives based model of rural planning of the Soviet Union. Seeking a more intermediate path between these two extremes were countries like India, a founding member of the block of so-called 'Third World' countries that sought to chart a distinct path to development. Examining the development of the rural planning concept in countries like the US and India provides a glimpse of the differing interpretations of rural planning that have been evolving around the world in countries where the government's ability to control, plan, and implement has been limited by, and has been cognizant of, the significant role of the private sector in the farming endeavor. Study of the China model provides insight on the strengths and limitations of sustained, centralized efforts to control developments in rural economy and society.

1. The United States Model of Rural Planning

The US is acknowledged to be one of the most open and laissez faire economies in the world. Within the US, the idea that attention needs to be turned specifically to rural planning is not a widely embraced concept. But models of economic growth that guide policy are accepted and in these the agricultural sector is factored as an integral component of the national economy. Historically, US agricultural policy has defined and shaped rural conditions and had far-reaching consequences on the development of rural areas, but it has not been recognized as an instrument for rural planning.

This American ambivalence towards acknowledging the existence of rural planning is understandable given historical antecedents. After American independence, the feudalistic land law that prevailed under British rule was replaced with a freehold land tenure system under which public lands were sold to raise cash for the new government. To facilitate sales the US Congress ordered a land survey in 1785 that established a grid system of land division as the dominant pattern for the area west of Pittsburgh. Its

indelible stamp ordered the transportation and communication systems and helped give shape to rural administrative areas. Subsequent land laws and purchase allowed 'a mass distribution of land to those who tilled the soil [that] was unique in the history of the world up to that time' Cocharane (1979, p. 57). The philosophy of land ownership as vesting freehold in an individual, and the establishment of a unique American tradition of independent and self reliant farm families scattered in a regular pattern, each in isolation, on their own individual pieces of land, has perhaps contributed to a national antipathy to identifying government interventions as responsible for rural development. Nonetheless these early interventions shaped the rural context, with plans that were not always openly agreed to or publicly articulated, and embedded it with desired outcomes that might have been contested if formally acknowledged in planning documents.

The movement of the US agricultural enterprise from the subsistence cultivation of the pioneer to the high tech, mechanized, computerized, agro industry of today's corporate farm is not the product of free-market forces but of significant government actions. The role of the government in shaping US farming is noted and generally accepted in the literature pertaining to American agriculture (Rasmussen 1960, Cocharane 1979, McConnell 1953). Cocharane (1979, p. 277) delineates a broad and inclusive set of categories in which government has been active, asserting that it has been involved in almost every aspect of agricultural development. With the passage of the Agricultural Adjustment Acts of 1933 and 1938 the Department of Agriculture has supported and managed agricultural production pursuing policies affecting both the supply and distribution systems of agricultural production (Cocharane 1979, pp. 141-2).

1.1 Modern Farming in the US

Government activities in the transport, research, and education sectors have transformed American agriculture from subsistence to cash cropping for regional and national markets and later to capital-intensive agribusiness. Significant government support of educational and research institutions assisting in agricultural development through scientific and technological innovations has been sustained for more than a century. The Morrill Act of 1862 enabled government to fund land grant colleges in each state and the Hatch Act of 1887 allowed annual allocations for state agricultural experimentation stations devoted to basic agriculture research (Rasmussen 1960). The impact of this activity on shaping the scientific base of modern American farming and increasing productivity and efficiency was significant and to date has had resonance and wielded influence around the world.

In response to the worldwide Depression of 1929 New Deal agricultural economists created the Agricultural Adjustment Acts of 1933 and 1938, to set the price and allowable level of farm production. The central theme in these legislative efforts was to stabilize agricultural prices and income by offering subsidy payments to farmers to reduce production, price support measures, and commodity storage. In the postwar period from 1945 to 1975 the modern farm evolved in the context of rapid advances in national/international transport the emergence of the United States as a major world power, and the corresponding change in its domestic and foreign policy, and tremendous advances in scientific/technological farming in the United States including development of high-yield hybrids, fertilizers, pest controls, and extensive mechanization. The modern farm featured large-scale production for national and international markets. Cultivation for sale rather than family subsistence became the central production objective of the farm enterprise. However the ideological underpinnings of the earlier time of minimum government control in the farm enterprise persisted. There was support for government to be an agent responsible for presenting new options and alternatives which might voluntarily be subscribed to, or not, by the American farmer.

1.2 Corporate Farming in the US

A shift from modern to corporate farming after 1975 was triggered by changes in the role the United States played in world affairs and the tack it took with respect to its foreign policy following World War II. The United States emerged as a leading proponent of global free trade. This posture meant that the highly efficient farms in the US began to function as the 'world's breadbasket.' Farmers produced and exported crops to India, Russia, and other countries when these countries faced domestic shortfalls in food production. Advances in national and international transport aided this expansion of the market. 'Green revolution' technology packages of high-yielding hybrids, super fertilizers, and pest controls were developed leading to unexpectedly large crop yields. Specialization and mono-crop farms become common. Although energy intensive in their use of new products and machinery, they were viable as energy costs were kept relatively low by the government. A process of consolidation of family and modern farms into larger and larger vertically and horizontally integrated corporate entities occurred. The resulting corporate super farms have changed the rural landscape tremendously as fewer and fewer farms account for more and more of the of total farm sales and total farm profits in the United States. This concentration is apparent in the fact that in 1997 two percent of all farms in the US produced 50 percent of total farm sales.

1.3 Services-oriented Rural Planning

In the 1980s and 1990s it has been increasingly obvious in the United States that although the link between agriculture policy and rural planning has traditionally been very strong it may be less important in the emerging 'global' economy of the twenty-first century. Today the link that needs to be forged for rural planning is with economic sectors such as manufacturing and services. The emerging 'new economy' is based on the growth of the service sector and geared to the information industry that has centralized population in metropolitan areas. The impact of this centralization on populations that remain rural and dispersed is significant. For example in rural areas public services in education, health, and social welfare provision are of lower quality than in metropolitan areas. Currently US rural planning efforts have focused on providing quality services despite the delivery difficulties posed by lower population densities that mean that greater distances must be covered to reach targeted rural populations. A second strand of rural planning pertains to national settlement patterns and the belief that it is important to maintain numbers of people in rural areas. Planning efforts creating rural enterprise and empowerment zones have involved job-training programs as an economic development policy to attract entrepreneurs. The second element of this strategy aims to reduce costs for entrepreneurship in rural areas by programs that make capital available for business development. The scale of such efforts is however quite modest. Finally, the current paradigm of rural planning focuses on equalizing rural communication and infrastructure with urban. Supporting the expansion of Internet and high-speed communications links, wireless, and satellite connections all aimed at linking dispersed populations are an integral part of this agenda.

2. The 'Third World' Approach to Rural Planning

Numerous countries attained independence from European colonial rule at the end of World War II. Some, like the Peoples' Republic of China, became 'Second World' countries that adopted planning models emulating Soviet style control by a strong central government. Another block of countries attempted to forge a separate third path to development differing from United States style capitalism and Soviet style socialism. This 'Third World' forged constitutions endorsing centralized planning by government to attain modernization by facilitating rapid industrialization of both the private and public sectors. In these models rural planning tended to be a key element in national economic development. Rural planning measures aimed to increase production but also to redistribute wealth on the grounds of social justice and human welfare. The latter provided legitimacy for governmental planning which was essential

in countries recently released from colonization. Furthermore the majority of these nations' populations were rural. In approaching the development of rural areas many of these countries emulated the US model. They aimed to increase and improve agricultural production through the application of scientific research that was to be developed, disseminated, and implemented in farming practice through agricultural extension services. This was seen as the modern way for rural planning to support national economic development.

Third World countries aimed to use agricultural production to raise capital for industrialization and the development of related infrastructure, as well as for the provision of urban as well as rural based populations. However they tempered their desire to increase agriculture production with the broader objective of bringing about an increased living standard and quality of life for economically disadvantaged populations in the countryside. Their emphasis on rural planning for human development reflected their recognition that the majority of their populations were rural, asset poor, involved in subsistence production, and members of lower status social groups of social structures that were feudal in character. Over time, these countries evolved a planning model for 'integrated rural development' that recognized gender and class differences and attempted to address social inequalities in access to rural resources; a process differentiated from earlier production oriented agricultural development models. This more recent approach to rural planning attempted to combine and balance between agricultural and economic development and social welfare and redistributive justice.

3. *The Indian Model*

At the point of independence from British rule India embraced rural planning directly. Initial Indian national-planning efforts to achieve rapid socioeconomic change concentrated on industrialization at chosen metropolitan centers, on the assumption that the benefits would 'trickle down' through the economy. Planners believed that although initially benefits would be concentrated in the core cities they would spread to rural areas. However, they also recognized the need to promote complementary rural planning to reduce existing and anticipated urban-rural disparities in wealth.

Rural planning measures in India conspicuously emulated the US model of agricultural development. They included: irrigation projects; the promotion of scientifically developed cash crops through the provision of improved seeds, equipment and fertilizer (the so-called Green Revolution approach to making agriculture productive); providing credit for agricultural investments to stimulate agricultural production; and, the establishment of a system of extension services

to introduce scientific farming techniques at the village level. They also regulated markets to stimulate trade in agricultural commodities; invested in roads and communications; and founded cooperatives to buy and sell agricultural products and facilitate the marketing of goods in rural areas.

3.1 *Redistribution and Equity*

The national policy of investing in industry and commercial agriculture increased the gap between those involved in the corporate formal sectors of the economy, urban and rural, and those in the informal, traditional, subsistence sectors. Rural landless and land poor, squeezed out of traditional positions in village society, migrated to the city in unprecedented numbers. Cities were unable to accommodate the massive influx of displaced, often unskilled, rural laborers and their families and urban environments deteriorated as slum settlements of the poor proliferated. Responding to this phenomenon inspired a new set of rural planning policies. Stemming migration to the city by improving rural life and diversifying the rural economy emerged as prime planning objectives. Making rural living more attractive included provision of postal service, healthcare facilities, clean drinking water, and electricity in the countryside. As this policy evolved, its objectives also expanded to include increasing equity and distributing the benefits of development to the poor more explicitly. This change inspired such planning measures as putting a ceiling on individual land holdings, reforming tenancy to enhance the rights to the land of those who cultivated it, initiating programs to support traditional artisans with better tools, establishing credit and marketing networks to allow them to compete with industry or at least sustain them until alternative jobs were created. Finally, the Indian government emphasized free, mandatory elementary school education throughout rural areas to improve skills the poor needed to compete for development benefits.

In 1976 A. T. Mosher an international agricultural development expert summarized the various phases of Indian rural development planning in *Thinking about Rural Development*. He described some common characteristics. They were:

(a) Recognition that although economic development is important it is not an essential precondition to the social transformation that is considered the central objective of a rural development strategy;

(b) Attention to increasing efficiency with the technical revolution of fertilizers and high yield varieties of cereals. The attempt was to boost both food grain production and commercial crops and monoculture production of commodities for which there was an international market;

(c) Development of programs that addressed equity and asset redistribution; and

(d) Enhancing rural citizen's participation in the evolution of locally appropriate planning programs. Elements of these phases of rural planning policy and objectives in India – moral and social transformation, economic efficiency, redistribution and social justice, and popular participation in decision making – are to be found in the rural planning approaches of many countries around the world although there is a great deal of variation both in emphasis in policy and in the capacity to implement.

4. *Current Priorities and Approaches in Rural Planning*

Rural planning oriented to improving physical infrastructure and the quality of life for rural populations was an important policy agenda in developing countries in the earlier periods of their post-independence histories. More recently, as rates of urbanization have remained high in these countries and cities have experienced hyper growth, despite efforts to stem rural migration and population increases, rural planning in many countries has become a lower priority endeavor. The worldwide liberalization of economies attention is focused on World cities of over 10 million people, and, as a result, notions of intervention in rural areas to improve rural conditions have been given far less significance.

Concerns about the long-term negative impacts of the 'Green Revolution' have emerged in many parts of the World. They are related to degradation of soil quality; depletion of groundwater tables; the long-term sustainability of modern agricultural cultivation on prime land; and, as supply of such land is exhausted, about the viability of applications of this technology package on poorer quality, more fragile lands; and rising concern about genetically modified crops entering the food system of human populations. These concerns have led to calls for a modified, mixed approach to rural development that recognizes traditional, sustainable practices. In contexts of risk prone environments, development planners are describing a need for a rural planning strategy in which 'top down' science driven Green Revolution strategies of intensifying agricultural cultivation are tempered with the understanding that can be attained by tapping the knowledge of rural cultivators who are following traditional, self sustaining forms of agricultural production (Pichón et al. 1999). This position, labeled 'sustainable agriculture', has stimulated rural planning efforts based on more traditional modes of agriculture (National Research Council 1989). The task of helping rural places has been defined as a set of two complementary concerns related to how people will earn a living (Lapping et al. 1989) and how they will do it so that natural, environmental resources will be conserved (Sargent et al. 1991).

In the 'First World' rural planning is coming full circle. From a 'universalistic' modern-science driven notion of development and progress there is a renewed orientation to the specificities of the local, rural, asset base of both physical and human capital. In much of the developing world, facing the waves of change engulfing countries in the throes of economic liberalization, rural planning has been placed much lower in priority to programs that address issues of rapid urbanization and globalization. Thus programs related to social justice, participatory decision making, sustainability, and the environment have taken second place to economic transformation of rural production.

See also: Agricultural Change Theory; Agricultural Sciences and Technology; Agriculture, Economics of; Development: Sustainable Agriculture; Environment and Development; Environmental and Resource Management; Environmentalism; Preservation and Conservation; Farmland Preservation; Green Revolution; Greening of Technology and Ecotechnology

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