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RURAL POVERTY UNPERCEIVED: PROBLEMS AND REMEDIES

A Background Study for World Development Report, 1980

The thesis of this paper is that there are major obstacles to perceiving the nature and the extent of rural poverty in developing countries. These obstacles originate not only in the nature of rural poverty itself, but also in the condition of those, not themselves of the rural poor, who do or, more significantly, do not perceive that poverty. The argument has implications for all rural development programs and projects, and for the training of staff. The conclusion is that reversals of current positions and practices are required if the obstacles are to be surmounted, if the nature and the extent of rural poverty are to be truly appreciated, and if future actions are to be tailored to the actual needs of the rural poor.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. AN OVERVIEW ............................................... 1

II. THE OBSTACLES TO PERCEPTION .............................. 3

   A. The Context of Cognitive Problems .................... 3
   B. Integrated Rural Poverty ............................. 6
   C. Rural Development Tourism ............................ 7

III. RURAL POVERTY UNOBSERVED: THE SIX BIASES ............... 12

   A. Spatial Biases: Urban, Tarmac and Roadside .......... 12
   B. Project Bias ........................................ 15
   C. Person Biases ........................................ 18
      1. Elite Bias ...................................... 18
      2. Male Bias ...................................... 20
      3. User and Adopter Biases ....................... 20
      4. Active, Present and Living Biases ............... 21
   D. Dry Season Bias ..................................... 21
   E. Biases of Politeness and Timidity .................. 23
   F. Professional Biases .................................. 23
   G. Review: The Unseen and the Unknown ............... 25

IV. REMEDIAL ACTION .......................................... 29

   A. Tactics for Tourists ................................ 30
   B. Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) .......................... 33
   C. In-Service Research as Training ...................... 35
      1. Surveys .......................................... 35
      2. Poverty-focussed Research ....................... 36
      3. Groups, Workshops and Seminars .................. 37
   D. Games and Role-Playing ............................... 37
   E. Reversals: Learning From And Working With .......... 40
   F. Rewards: Prestige and Promotion .................... 42

V. CONCLUSION ............................................... 46

References
I. AN OVERVIEW

This paper argues that in developing countries poor rural people and rural poverty generally are underperceived or misperceived by those who are themselves neither poor nor rural. This process can be understood, first, in terms of the obstacle presented by global cores and peripheries of knowledge, with poor, weak, rural people at the peripheries and rich, powerful urban-based professionals at the cores; and, second, in terms of the obstacle raised by the integrated nature of rural poverty, especially by the isolation of the poor.

A major associated influence on, or obstacle to, the perceptions of urban-based outsiders is that of rural development tourism -- the phenomenon of the brief rural visit. It is widely practised but little analyzed. These three obstacles to perception are discussed in Section II.

When examined, rural development tourism is found to exhibit six biases against contact with poverty and poor or poorer people. These are spatial biases -- urban, tarmac and roadside; project biases -- the tendency for projects to be visited to the neglect of nonproject areas where less is being done; person biases -- contacts with the less poor and more influential rural people, with men rather than women, with users of services and adopters of new practices rather than nonusers and nonadopters, and with those who are active, present and living; dry season bias -- the tendency for visits to be made during tropical dry seasons when poverty is less marked, rather than during the lean, hungry and sick periods of wet seasons; biases of politeness and of timidity, with visitors not wishing to offend through seeking out those who are poorer; and professional biases which illuminate only part of poverty and not the whole. These biases interlock and reinforce each other, whether in rural development tourism, in much of rural research, or in the behavior of junior officials in
rural areas. As a result, rural poverty is systematically underperceived or misperceived. The six biases are analyzed in Section III.

Remedial action, discussed in Section IV, is not easy, but changes in cognition and behavior may be sought in at least half a dozen ways: through improving rural development tourism; through techniques for rapid rural appraisal (RRA); through poverty-oriented research to be carried out by officials as part of in-service training; through role-playing in poverty games; through reversing the learning process so that urban-based outsiders become the pupils and rural insiders their teachers; and through rewards of prestige and promotion for work with the rural poor.

A brief conclusion (Section V) points out that these measures, while no panacea, may constitute one feasible set of thrusts for reducing rural poverty.
II. THE OBSTACLES TO PERCEPTION

The thesis of this paper is that there are major obstacles to perceiving the nature and extent of rural poverty in developing countries. These obstacles originate not only in the nature of rural poverty itself, but also in the condition of those, not themselves of the rural poor, who do, or more significantly, do not perceive that poverty. The argument has implications for all rural development programs and projects and for the training of staff. The conclusion is that reversals of current positions and practices are required if the obstacles are to be surmounted, if the nature and the extent of rural poverty are to be truly appreciated, and if future action is to be tailored to the actual needs of the rural poor. First, however, the obstacles themselves must be delineated.

A. The Context of Cognitive Problems

The argument is set in a context of cores and peripheries of knowledge. Globally, these in turn reflect a gradient from extremes of wealth to extremes of poverty. In this system there coexist rich, urban, industrialized, high status cores and poor, rural, agricultural and low status peripheries. In the cores there is a mutual attraction and reinforcement of power, prestige, resources, professionals, professional training, and the capacity to generate and disseminate knowledge. Both internationally, and within individual developing countries, centripetal forces draw resources and educated people in towards the cores and away from the peripheries. At the international level, brain drains are a well-known phenomenon. But there are similar movements within developing countries. The urban web attracts and then traps professionals, holding them fast with better houses, services, schools and career prospects. Domestic cycles and career patterns reinforce the flow. Young, unmarried officials are sent to remote poor rural areas, but age, marriage, children,
seniority and responsibility draw them in towards larger and larger urban and administrative centers. Academic researchers do their fieldwork in rural areas when they are young and inexperienced, but when they become older and more experienced, they too are trapped in towns by family, teaching and promotional responsibilities and prospects. As people grow older and more influential, so too they move further from rural life. They also become busier. In international agencies, in national ministries or departments, or at the subnational level, they become increasingly involved in rural development only at the policy level. Correspondingly, it becomes increasingly likely that their only firsthand experience of rural conditions will now be through brief visits. The more influential, important and busy they become, the more such visits are likely to be selective and formally structured. The more powerful such professionals become, the less contact they have with rural poverty.

There are other cognitive problems over and above the basic aspects of actual contact with rural poverty. University education and professional training impart an assortment of biases. These are variously urban, industrial, high technology, capital intensive, appropriate for temperate climates, and market rather than subsistence orientated. Textbooks, curricula, examinations, professional journals, academic awards, national and international distinctions, professional values and ideas of sophistication, the media, the priority accorded armaments and security, the desire of elites for international mobility -- these are among the interlocking influences which shape ambitions, mold ways of seeing things, and sway choices as to where in the world one is to work. The cognitive apparatus formed by education and training is often specialized. Its blinkers allow only a narrow view, and most professionals do not in any case face towards, let alone live in, rural areas. Those that do have often been
disabled by their conditioning. Their attention is thus directed towards those with whom they have most in common -- the less poor rural people. They form their often temporary links with whatever they can find in rural areas which is familiar, that is, whatever is modern, marketed, urban in origin, and sophisticated. Accordingly, they see, and prescribe for, only that specialized part of the whole. At its ugliest, such professional training inculcates an arrogance in which superior knowledge and superior status are assumed. Professionals then see the rural poor as ignorant, backward and primitive, and who have only themselves to blame for their poverty. Social Darwinism then lives again in the ideologies of the prosperous and therefore virtuous urban elites looking out on the rural mass, the poverty of whose members reflects their lack of virtue. The very phrase -- "the rural mass" -- fosters stereotypes, convenient glosses hiding ignorance of the reality. Not only do urban-based professionals and officials often not know the rural reality; worse, they do not know that they do not know.

These outspoken assertions have, of course, to be qualified. Many initiatives are sensitive to rural poverty: programs for primary health care, adult education, appropriate technology, off-season employment, research on the subsistence crops of poor people, and so on. But an exclusive focus on these initiatives can distort judgment. Myths of enlightenment can be created and sustained by the enlightened meeting the enlightened, though darkness is all around. A few outstanding individuals, projects and institutions draw attention away from the many others that are less than outstanding. They may also obscure the fact that on the gradients between cores and peripheries there are many points where power, professional authority, and ignorance of rural poverty are to be found clustered together.
B. Integrated Rural Poverty

The cognitive problems of observers are only part of the difficulties encountered in approaching rural poverty. The other part stems from the nature of rural poverty itself. Insofar as attempts are indeed made to push out from the urban cores in order to learn about rural poverty, then it is the poorer people who are inescapably the most remote and most difficult to reach.

One way of analyzing rural poverty or deprivation is in terms of five interlocking dimensions: poverty proper (lack of assets and lack of flows of food and cash); physical weakness (reflected in lower body weights and greater seasonal variation in those weights); vulnerability to contingencies (to irreversible ratchets of impoverishment -- the mortgage or sale of assets or the incurring of debts because of sickness, famine, disaster, dowry, bridewealth or other costs); powerlessness (both political and in terms of control of events and relationships); and isolation. All five facets contribute to the integrated nature of rural poverty; and the list does not include many other influences -- international, intranational, within rural society -- which perpetuate and deepen poverty. But for our purposes, isolation deserves special attention; this is the dimension which most impedes the understanding of outsiders, and which by its very nature may be the least easy to recognize.

The isolation of poor families and households can be described in terms which are spatial, social, and related to knowledge and access. Spatially, poor families tend to be removed from the center of things: either they are in areas remote from urban centers, or they are on the edges of villages or away from main roads.1/ Socially, they may have fewer relationships on which they can

1/ See the detailed discussion of urban, tarmac and roadside spatial biases in the next Section.
rely: poorer households tend to be smaller, and many of the poorest have female heads. They are illiterate, have no radio, and know little about events beyond their neighborhood. Their members rarely go to public meetings, receive no advice from extension workers in agriculture, health, family planning or nutrition, and travel little, except in search of work. They make less use of services (health, transport, education) than their less poor neighbors. They are either fragmented and scattered as members migrate for work, or trapped in one place by debts and other obligations. Many adopt a low profile strategy: by accepting powerlessness as a condition of protection, they demonstrate that they will not pose any threat to their patrons. Some, whose legal position is weak, as in the case of self-settling refugees (Chambers 1979)1/ and squatters (Mbithi and Barnes 1975), may even try to hide, to be invisible to the official eye. Out of sight, they hope to be out of mind.

C. Rural Development Tourism

There are many ways in which urban-based outsiders may learn about rural poverty and the rural poor. Some of the sources are questionnaire surveys, village studies, reports of social anthropologists, findings of medical and nutritional research, censuses, statistics showing the use of services, routine or special reports within government systems or by nongovernment organizations, and project evaluations. But a major -- and perhaps the most important -- influence on the perceptions of urban-based outsiders is rural development tourism -- rural tourism for short -- the phenomenon of the brief rural visit. It influences, and is a part of, all or almost all the other sources of information listed above. It is widespread. There are thousands, perhaps tens of thousands,

1/ References are listed at the end of the paper.
of instances daily. In spite of its prevalence rural tourism has not to my knowledge been seriously analyzed. This omission is astonishing, until one reflects on the reasons for it. For academic analysis, rural tourism is too dispersed and ephemeral a phenomenon to lend itself to facile precision. It does not rest neatly in any disciplinary domain, and it is barely conceivable as a topic for a thesis. For practical professionals engaged in rural development, it is perhaps too close to the nose to be in focus. Rural tourism is, moreover, a subject of anecdote and an object of shame. It generates stories for bar gossip rather than facts for comparative study, and is associated with memories of personal follies one prefers not to expose to public ridicule. In any event, self-critical introspection is not one of the more prominent characteristics of rural developers. Yet it is through this rural tourism, if at all, that "core" (urban-based, professional, powerful) visitors see and meet those who are "peripheral" (rural, uneducated, weak). The brief rural visits by "core" personnel can scarcely fail to play a key part in forming their impressions and beliefs and influencing their actions and decisions.

The visit of a rural tourist may be for one day or for several. The "tourists" or visitors may come from a foreign country, a capital city, a seat of regional or provincial government, a district headquarters, or some smaller urban place. Most commonly they are government officials -- administrators, health staff, agriculturalists, educators, community developers, engineers, foresters, or inspectors of this and that; but they may also be private technical

This estimate may seem high. But if just district headquarters are considered, let alone capital cities, provincial or regional headquarters, subdistrict headquarters, and other towns, and even without including China, 80 countries with an average of 30 districts require only a little over 4 visits a day per district to make a daily total of 10,000 occurrences.

A one-day Workshop on Rural Development Tourism was, however, held at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, on March 10, 1977. In writing this paper, I acknowledge a debt to the discussions at that workshop.
specialists, academic researchers, the staff of voluntary agencies, journalists, diplomats, politicians, consultants, or the staff of aid agencies. Differing widely in race, nationality, religion, profession, age, sex, language, interests, prejudices, conditioning and experience, the visitors nevertheless usually have three things in common: they come from urban areas; they want to find something out; and they are short of time.

Rural tourism has many purposes and many styles. Technical specialists concerned with physical resources may in practice have little contact with the rural residents, and there may be little formality about their visits. Others -- those concerned with administration and human development in its various forms -- may in contrast be involved in many meetings with rural residents. It is with these kinds of visits that we are primarily concerned.

Caricature is tempting in this context, and exaggeration is built into any process of induction from anecdotes which are repeated and remembered because they are good stories. There are also differences between cultures, environments and individual tourists. The following sketch illustrates the pathology of such visits, especially when they are carried out by people who are treated as important. It is not intended as a balanced portrayal.

The visitor sets out late, delayed by last minute business, by colleagues, subordinates or superiors anxious for decisions before his or her departure, by a family crisis, by a cable or telephone call, by others taking part in the same visit, by mechanical or administrative problems with vehicles, by urban traffic jams, or by any one of a hundred forms of human error. Even if the way is not lost, and there is enough fuel, and there are no breakdowns, the program still runs behind schedule. The visitor is encapsulated, first in a Landrover, Jeep or other vehicle, and later in a moving entourage of officials and local notables (headmen, chairmen of village committees, village accountants, progressive
farmers, traders, and the like). Whatever their private feelings, (indifference, suspicion, amusement, anxiety, irritation, or enthusiasm), the rural residents put on their best face and receive the visitor hospitably. According to ecology, economy and culture, the visitor is given goats, garlands, coconut milk, coca cola, coffee, tea or milk. Speeches are made. School children sing or clap. Photographs are taken. Buildings, machines, construction works, new crops, exotic animals, the clinic, the school, the new road -- all are inspected. A self-conscious group (the self-help committee, the women's handicraft group), dressed in their best clothes, are seen and spoken to. They nervously respond in ways which they hope will bring benefits and avoid penalties. There are tensions between the visitor's questions and curiosity, the officials' desire to select what is seen, and the mixed motives of different rural groups and individuals who have to live with the officials and with each other after the visitor has left. Time and an overloaded program are nevertheless on the side of the locals. As the day wears on and heats up, the visitor becomes less inquisitive, asks fewer questions, and is finally glad, exhausted and bemused, to retire to the circuit bungalow, the rest house, the guest house, the host official's residence, or back to an urban home or hotel. The village returns to normal, no longer wearing its special face. When darkness falls and people talk more freely, the visitor is not there.

Shortage of time, the importance of the visitor, and the desire for information separately or together influence what is perceived. Lack of time drives out the open-ended question; the visitor imposes meanings through the questions asked. Checking is impossible, and prudent and hopeful, or otherwise self-serving, lies become accepted as facts. Individually or in groups, people are neglected while formal actions and physical objects are given attention. Refugees in a rural camp in Tanzania said of UN and government officials that
"They come, and they sign the book, and they go," and "They only talk with the buildings." A villager in Senegal said to Adrian Adams concerning visitors "Ils ne savent pas qu'il y a ici des gens vivants" (Adams 1978). Above all, on such visits, it is the poorer people who tend not to be seen or, especially, to be met.
III. RURAL POVERTY UNOBSERVED: THE SIX BIASES

There are many biases against contact with and perceptions of poverty in general and the deepest poverty in particular. They apply not only to rural tourism, but also variously to rural research and to the behavior and perceptions of low-level staff living and working in rural areas. A half-dozen of such biases will now be discussed.

A. Spatial Biases: Urban, Tarmac and Roadside

Most learning about rural conditions is mediated by vehicles. This applies not only to rural tourism, but also to research. Starting and ending in urban centers, visits follow networks of roads. With rural tourism, the hazards of dirt roads, the comfort of the tourist, the location of places for spending the night, the location of places to visit, and shortages alike of time and, increasingly, of fuel dictate a preference for tarmac roads and for travel close to urban centers. The result is overlapping urban and roadside biases.

Urban bias concentrates rural visits near urban centers and especially near capital cities and large administrative centers. But the regional distribution of the poorest rural residents often shows concentration in remoter areas -- Northeastern Brazil, lower Ukambani in Kenya, the Tribal Districts of Central India. In many parts of the developing world, some of the poorest people are being extruded from those densely populated areas better served with communications and are being forced, in order to survive, to colonize less accessible areas, especially the savannahs and forests. Inaccessible from the urban centers, the poorest of the poor remain largely unseen.

Tarmac and roadside biases also direct attention towards those who are less poor and away from those who are poorer or poorest. Visible development
follows main roads. Factories, offices, shops and official markets all tend to be at the sides of main roads. Even agricultural development has a roadside bias: in Tamil Nadu agricultural demonstrations of new seeds and fertilizers have been sited beside main roads; and on irrigation systems, roads often follow canals so that the farms seen are those of the "topenders" who receive more water and not those of the "tailenders" who receive less or none. Services along roadsides are also better. Edward Heneveld (personal communication) found that two schools beside the main highway from West to North Sumatra had more than their quota of teachers, while a school one kilometer off the road had less than its quota. For part of Western Kenya, Joseph Ssennyonga has described an "elite roadside ecology" (1976:9). As services are provided along the roadside -- improved tarmac surface for the road, buses, electricity, telephone, piped water supply -- so those who are better-off buy up roadside plots and build on them. The poorer people shift away out of sight. The visitor then sees the better-off people and their houses, gardens and services, and not the poorer people and theirs. Ribbon development along roadsides gives a false impression in many countries. The better the roads, the nearer the urban center, and the higher the traffic, so the more pronounced is the roadside development and the more likely visitors are to see it and be misled.

Nor does roadside bias apply only to main roads. Within villages, the poorer people may be hidden from the main streets and the places where people meet. M. P. Moore and G. Wickremesinghe, reporting on a study of three villages in the Low Country of Sri Lanka, have this to say about "hidden poverty":

In retrospect at least, one of the most obvious aspects of poverty in the study villages is the extent to which it is concealed from view...the proportion of "poor" households ....varies from 14% in Wattegama to 41% in Weligalagoda. Yet one could drive along all the motorable roads in the villages and scarcely see a single "poor" house. Here, as in most of rural Sri Lanka, wealthier households use their social and economic power to obtain roadside homestead sites.
Not only do these confer easier access to such tangible services as buses, electricity connections or hawkers, but they provide such intangible benefits as better information and gossip from passersby. Equally, the roadside dweller has a potential site for opening a small shop, especially if located near the all-important road junctions, which provide the focus of commercial and social life in almost all rural areas. To even see the houses of the poor one often has to leave the road. Many visitors, including public officers, appear not to do so very often.

(forthcoming: 98; emphasis added)

Much the same can be said of harijan colonies in or near villages in South India.

It is not just officials and rural tourists who are trapped within these biases. Social science researchers are far from immune. There are honorable exceptions, but urban and tarmac biases are sometimes evident in the choice of villages to study. Of all specialists, social anthropologists are perhaps the least susceptible; but even they have sometimes succumbed: as they have grown, Bangalore and Bangkok have each swallowed up a social anthropologist's village. Again, when Indian institutions were urged to adopt villages, two research and training organizations in Bangalore, unknown to each other, settled on the same village: it can scarcely be a coincidence that it was close to the main Bangalore-Mysore road, a decent but not excessive distance from Bangalore itself. Within villages, too, the central, more prosperous, core is likely to attract researchers. Moore, again describing three villages in Sri Lanka, writes:

Apart from the roadside issue, the core can exercise a great pull on the outsider who decides to do a few days a week of fieldwork. Apart from the facilities and the sense of being at the strategic hub of local affairs, it can claim a sense of history and tradition, to which sociologists especially appear vulnerable.

Moore considers that sociologists writing on Sri Lanka have focussed on core areas and completely ignored their peripheries. One may speculate about how generally the location of good informants and of facilities at the cores of
villages prevents perception by social scientists of the peripheries and of the peripheral people.

Urban bias is further accentuated by fuel shortages and costs. Whenever governments make budget cuts, the travel vote is a favorite; it can be trimmed without visible loss. But each cut makes rural contact rarer and harder, and urban and tarmac bias more pronounced. When fuel costs rise dramatically, as they have done in recent years, the effect is especially marked in those poor countries which are without oil and also short of foreign exchange. Rural visits, research and projects shrink back from more distant, often poorer, areas to those which are closer, more prosperous and cheaper to visit.1/ District agricultural officers in Bangladesh have been severely restricted in the use of their vehicles. Cuts in transport allocations for staff responsible for supervising canal irrigation have occurred in India: likely effects are less supervision leading to less water being provided to the already deprived "tailends," and less knowledge of what is happening there. Every rise in oil prices not only impoverishes the remoter, poorer people by tilting the urban-rural terms of trade against them more sharply, but also at the same time reduces the chances of that deprivation being known. Visits, attention and projects are increasingly concentrated in the economically advantaged peri-urban areas.

B. Project Bias

Rural tourism and rural research exhibit a strong project bias. Those concerned with rural development and with rural research become linked to networks of urban-rural contacts. They are then pointed to those rural places

1/ An early example is provided by Zambia's fuel shortage which led to fuel rationing following Rhodesia's unilateral declaration of independence in 1965: one effect was that the Universities of Nottingham and Zambia joint research project concerned with the productivity of agricultural labor was restricted to work in two areas instead of three, and these were areas which were relatively well-developed agriculturally, having had large inputs of education, extension and communication (Elliott 1970:648).
where something is happening—where money is being sent, staff are stationed, a project is in hand. Ministries, departments, distract staff, and voluntary agencies all pay special attention to projects and channel visitors towards them. Contact and learning are then with tiny atypical islands of activity which attract repeated and mutually reinforcing attention.

Project bias is most marked with the showpiece: the nicely groomed pet project or model village, specially staffed and supported, with well-briefed members who know what to say, and which is sited a reasonable but not excessive distance from the urban headquarters. Governments in capital cities need such projects for foreign visitors; district and subdistrict staff need them too, for visits by their senior officers. Such projects provide a quick and simple reflex to solve the problem of what to do with visitors or senior staff on inspection. Once again, they direct attention away from the rural poor.

The better known cases concern those rural development projects which have attracted international attention. Any roll of honor would include the Anand Dairy Cooperatives in India; the Chilalo Agricultural Development Unit in Ethiopia; the Comilla Project in Bangladesh; the Gezira Scheme in Sudan; the Intensive Agricultural Districts Programme (IADP) in India; Lilongwe in Malawi; the Muda Irrigation Project in Malaysia; the Mwea Irrigation Settlement in Kenya; and the Ujamaa program in Tanzania. All of these have been much

1/ Or in one case close to the famous tourist site for the VIP. As J. K. Galbraith has remarked of India, although hopes and enthusiasm for community development waned, "A number of show villages continued to impress the more susceptible foreign visitors." He records this incident: "In the spring of 1961, Lyndon Johnson, then vice president, was taken to see one of these villages in the neighborhood of Agra. It was, of the several hundred thousand villages of India, the same one that Dwight D. Eisenhower had been shown a year or two before. It was impressive in its cleanliness, simple cultural life, handicrafts, and evidence of progressive agricultural techniques. Johnson, an old hand in problems of agricultural uplift and difficult to deceive, then demanded to see the adjacent village a mile or two away. After strong protesting words about its lack of preparation to receive him, he was taken there. This village, one judged, had undergone no major technical, cultural, or hygienic change in the previous thousand years" (Galbraith 1979: 106-107).
visited and much studied. Students seeking doctorates have read about them then sought to do their fieldwork on them.\footnote{\textit{Mea culpa.} In the 1960s so many students and other researchers were attracted to work on the (well-documented, well-organized and well-known) Mwea Irrigation Settlement in Kenya that farmers complained about interview saturation.} Research generates more research, and investment by donors draws research after it and funds it. In India, the IADP, a program designed to increase production sharply in a few districts which were well-endowed with water, exercised a powerful attraction to research compared to the rest of India. An analysis (Harriss 1977; 30-34) of rural social science research published in the \textit{Economic and Political Weekly} showed an astonishing bias to IADP districts, and an almost total neglect of the very poor areas of central India. In a different way, the Comilla Project may also have misled, since Comilla District has the lowest proportion of landless in any district in Bangladesh. Research on ujamaa in Tanzania in the later 1960s focussed heavily on three exceptional villages or clusters of villages (the Ruvuma Development Association, Mbambara, and Upper Kitete) which were among the very few in the whole country with substantial communal agricultural production. Research, reports and publications have given all these atypical projects high profiles, and these in turn have generated more interest and more visitors.

Fame forces the managers of such projects into public relations. More and more of their time has to be spent showing visitors around. Flooded with the celebrated, the curious, and the ignorant -- prime ministers, graduate students, women's groups, farmers' groups, aid missions, school parties, committees and directors of this and that -- managers set up public relations units and develop a public relations style. Visitors then get the treatment. A fluent guide follows a standard routine and a standard route. The same people...
are met, the same buildings entered, the same books signed, the same polite praise inscribed in the book against the visitors' names. Questions are drowned in statistics; doubts inhibited by handouts. Inquisitive visitors depart loaded with research papers, technical evaluations, and annual reports which they probably will never read. They leave with a sense of guilt at the unworthy scepticism which prompted probing questions, and with memories of some of those who are better-off in the special project, and of the charisma of the exceptional leader or manager who has created it. They write their journey reports, evaluations and articles on the basis of these impressions. For their part, the project staff have reinforced through repetition the beliefs which sustain their morale. Thus, projects take off into the realm of self-sustaining myth.

C. Person Biases

The persons with whom rural tourists, local-level officials, and rural researchers have contact, and from whom they obtain impressions and information, are biased against poorer people.

1. Elite Bias. "Elite" is used here to describe those rural people who are less poor and more influential. They typically include progressive

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1/ In February 1979, two British Members of Parliament visited the Anand Cooperatives in India. They saw and were impressed by the delivery of milk from small producers to one center. Inside hung a photograph of James Callaghan, the British Prime Minister, taken during his visit to the same center. Asked if they would like to see a second center, they readily assented. Once inside they found another photograph, this time of the visit to that center of Judith Hart, the British Minister of Overseas Development.

2/ This is intended as a statement of fact, not a judgment. There is something of the Greek tragedy in the way some conspicuous projects are driven down this path which leads, progressively, to self-deception, hubris, defensiveness and, ultimately, debunking of the legend.
farmers, village leaders, headmen, traders, religious leaders, teachers, and paraprofessionals. They are the main sources of information for rural tourists, for local-level officials, and even for rural researchers. They are the most fluent informants. It is they who receive and speak to the visitors; they who articulate "the village's" interests and wishes; their concerns which emerge as the village's priorities for development. It is they who entertain visitors, generously providing the expected beast or beverage. It is they who receive the lion's share of attention, advice and services from agricultural extension staff (Chambers 1974:58; Leonard 1977, Ch. 9). It is they too, who, at least at first, monopolize the time and attention of the visitor.

Conversely, the poorer or the poorest do not speak up. With those of higher status, they may even decline to sit down. Weak, powerless and isolated, they are often reluctant to push themselves forward. In Paul Devitt's words:

The poor are often inconspicuous, inarticulate and unorganized. Their voices may not be heard at public meetings in communities where it is customary for only the big men to put their views. It is rare to find a body or institution that adequately represents the poor in a certain community or area. Outsiders and government officials invariably find it more profitable and congenial to converse with local influentials than with the uncommunicative poor.

(1977:23)

The poor are a residuul, the last in the line, the most difficult to find, and the hardest to learn from:

Unless paupers and poverty are deliberately and persistently sought, they tend to remain effectively screened from outside inquirers.

(ibid. 24)
2. **Male Bias.** Most rural tourists, local-level government staff, and researchers are men. Most rural people with whom they establish contact are men. Female farmers are neglected by male agricultural extension workers. In most societies women have inferior status and are subordinate to men. There are variations and exceptions, but quite often women are shy of speaking to visitors, especially to men. And yet poor rural women are a poor and deprived class within a class. They often work very long hours, and they are usually paid less than men. Rural single women, women heads of households, and widows include many of the most wretched and unseen of the people in the world.

3. **User and Adopter Biases.** Where visits are concerned with facilities or innovations, the users of services and the adopters of new practices are more likely to be seen than are nonusers and nonadopters. This bias applies to visitors who have a professional interest in, say, education, health or agriculture, to local-level officials, and to researchers. They tend to visit buildings and places where activity is concentrated, easily visible, and hence easy to study. Children in school are more likely to be seen and questioned than those children who are not in school; those who use the health clinic more than those who are too sick, too poor, or too distant to use it; those who come to market because they have goods to sell or money with which to buy more than those who stay at home because they have neither; members of the cooperative more than those who are too poor or powerless to join it; those who have adopted new agricultural, health or family planning practices than those who have not.
4. Active, Present and Living Biases. Those who are active are more visible than those who are not. Fit, happy children gather around the Jeep or Landrover, not those who are weak and miserable. Dead children are rarely seen. The sick lie in their huts. Inactive old people are often out of sight; a social anthropologist has recorded how he spent some time camping outside a village before he realized that old people were starving (Turnbull 1973; 102). Those who are absent or dead cannot be met, but those who have migrated and those who have died may include many of the most deprived. Much of the worst poverty is hidden by its removal.

D. Dry Season Bias

Most of the poor rural people in the world live in areas of marked wet-dry seasonality, most of it tropical. For the great majority whose livelihood depend on cultivation the most difficult time of the year is usually the wet season, especially before the first harvest. Food is short, food prices high, work hard, and infections prevalent. Malnutrition, morbidity and mortality all rise; body weights decline. The poorer people, women and children are particularly vulnerable. Birth weights drop and neonatal mortality rises. Child care is inadequate. Desperate people become indebted. This is both the hungry season and the sick season. It is also the season of ratchets, of irreversible downward movements into poverty through the sale or mortgaging of assets, the time when poor people are most likely to become poorer.1/

The wet season is also the unseen season. Rural visits by the urban-based have their own seasonality, as a little doggerel illustrates:

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1/ For the statements in this paragraph, see the papers of the Conference on Seasonal Dimensions to Rural Poverty summarized in Chambers et al. 1979, and also examined in Longhurst and Payne 1979 and Chambers 1979b.
Nutritionists with careful plan
counter their surveys when they can
be sure the weather's fine and dry,
the harvest in, food intake high.

Then students seeking Ph.D's
believe that everyone agrees
that rains don't do for rural study
- suits get wet and shoes get muddy.

And bureaucrats, of urban type
wait prudently till crops be ripe
before they venture far afield
to ask politely: "What's the yield?"

For monsoonal Asia, which has its major crop towards the end of the calendar
year, it is also relevant that

The international experts' flights
have other seasons; winter nights
in London, Washington and Rome
are what drive them, in flocks, from home

since they then descend on India and other countries in January and February
at precisely the time of least poverty, and when celebrations and marriages are
to be seen and heard.

There are, of course, some -- agriculturalists and epidemiologists --
who for professional reasons may make a point of rural travel during the rains,
for that is when crops grow and bugs and bacteria breed. But the disincentives
are strong. The rains are a bad time for rural travel because of the incon-
venience or worse posed by floods, mud, broken bridges, getting stuck, damaging
vehicles, losing time, and enduring discomfort. In some places roads are
officially closed. In the South Sudan there is a period of about two months
after the onset of the rains when roads are impassable but when there is not
yet enough water in the rivers for travel by boat. Many rural areas, especially
and precisely those which are remote and poor, are quite simply inaccessible
by vehicle during the rains. The worst times of the year for the poorer people
are thus those that are the least perceived by urban-based outsiders.
Once the rains are over such visitors can, however, travel more freely. It is in the dry season, when disease is diminishing, the harvest in, food stocks adequate, body weights rising, ceremonies in full swing, and people at their least deprived, that there is most contact between urban-based professionals and the rural poor. Not just rural development tourism, but rural appraisal generally is susceptible to a dry season bias. The poorest people are most visible at precisely those times when they are least deprived, and least visible when things are at their worst.

E. Biases of Politeness and Timidity

Rural tourists, local-level officials, and researchers may all be deterred by combinations of politeness and timidity from approaching, meeting, and listening to and learning from the poorer people. Poverty in any country may be a subject of indifference or shame, something to be shut out, something polluting, something, in the psychological sense, to be repressed. Those who make contact with it may offend those who are influential. The notables who generously offer hospitality to the visitor may not welcome searching questions about the poorer people. Senior officials visiting junior officials may not wish to examine or expose failures of programs intended to benefit the poor. Politeness and prudence variously inhibit the awkward question, the walk into the poorer quarters of the village, the discussion with the working women, the interviews with harijans. Courtesy and cowardice combine to discourage contact with the poorest people.

F. Professional Biases

Finally, professional training, values and interests present problems. Sometimes they focus attention on the less poor: agricultural extension staff,

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1/ A manual for assessing rural needs, warning about the unexpected in rural surveys, states "Once, the jeeps needed for transporting the interviewers were recalled for a month during the few precious months of the dry season" (Ashe 1979:26, emphasis added).
trained to advise on cash crops or to draw up farm plans, are drawn to the more "progressive" farmers; historians, sociologists and administrators, especially when short of time, can best satisfy their interests and curiosity through informants among the better-educated or less poor; those engaged in family welfare and family planning work find that bridgeheads for the adoption of new practices can most readily be established with better-off, better-educated families. But sometimes, in addition, professional training, values and interests do focus attention directly on the poor. This is especially so in the fields of nutrition and health, where those wishing to examine and to work with pathological conditions will tend to be drawn to the poorer people.

More generally, specialization, for all its advantages, makes it difficult for observers to see the holism of poverty. As suggested earlier, rural poverty is a syndrome in which lack of assets, inadequate flows of food and income, physical weakness and sickness, vulnerability to contingencies, powerlessness, and isolation interact and interlock. But professional training conditions otherwise intelligent people to look for and see much less. Professionals have been programmed by their education and experience to examine what shows up in a bright and slender beam which blinds them to what lies outside it. Knowing what they want to know, and short of time to find it out, professionals in rural areas become even more narrowly single-minded. To put it colloquially, they do their own thing and only their own thing. They look for and find what fits their paradigms. There is neither inclination nor time for the open-ended question or for other ways of perceiving people, events and things. "He that seeketh, findeth." Visiting the same village, a hydrologist enquires about the water table, a pedologist examines soil fertility, an agronomist investigates yields, an economist asks about wages and prices, a sociologist looks into patron-client relations, an administrator examines the tax collection
record, a doctor investigates hygiene and health, a nutritionist studies villagers' diets, and a family planner tries to find out about attitudes to numbers of children. Some of these visiting professionals may be sensitive to the holism of poverty, but none among them is likely to be able to fit all the pieces together, or even to assemble most of the negative factors as they affect the poorer people. The professionals will not then be fully aware of the mutually reinforcing nature of the linkages of poverty. Perhaps because of this professional specialization, there are few general case studies of poor families available; where they do exist (e.g. Lewis 1959; Ledesma 1977) they provide valuable insights which a specialist might miss. Perhaps most seriously of all, specialization prevents outsiders from seeing the world from the point of view of the poorer people. It impedes the necessary reversal of learning from them and with them. Their priorities, freely identified and expressed, may occasion surprise. They may also fall in or between the domains of several disciplines. If professionalism is narrow, however, it encourages overspecialized and misleading diagnoses and prescriptions which underestimate poverty by recognizing and confronting only part of the problem.

G. Review: The Unseen and the Unknown

The argument must not be overstated. To most of these generalizations about biases, exceptions can be found. There are government programs, voluntary organizations, and research projects that seek out those who are remote and poor. Some projects and programs, such as those for the weaker sections and vulnerable classes in rural India, have an anti-poverty focus. Person biases can work the other way: women's groups and women's programs attract attention; doctors are taken to those who are sick; nutritionists concentrate on the malnourished; agriculturalists and epidemiologists alike may have special
professional reasons for travel during the rains, and, during an agricultural season, a daytime visit to a village may provide encounters with the sick, aged and very young, and not with the able-bodied who are out in the fields. Such exceptions must be noted. At the same time, there are two dangers of underestimating the force of the biases: first, a failure to see how they interlock, and, second, a further underestimation of their incidence.

To address the first problem, the way in which spatial, project, person, dry season, politeness/timidity, and professional biases interact can be seen by analyzing almost any example of an urban-based outsider investigating rural conditions. Given the multiplicity of "insights" and beliefs about rural life, the several biases can and do reinforce each other. The prosperity after the harvest of a male farmer on a project besides a main road close to a capital city may color the perceptions of a succession of officials and dignitaries. The plight of a poor widow starving and sick in the wet season in a remote and inaccessible area may never in any way impinge on the consciousness of anyone outside her own community, and not on all of those within it.

The second problem is that few may be immune to these biases. It may be supposed that those who originate from rural areas, or who have a home or second home there, will not suffer from them. Any such supposition might be misleading. The evidence available is too anecdotal and sketchy to be more than suggestive, but the suggestion is rather strong. Three examples can be cited.

In the first case, in a densely populated part of western Kenya, junior agricultural extension staff and home economics workers were each given a random sample of 100 households to survey. The households were in the area where they worked. After the survey, they all considered that the sample had
been biased heavily against the more progressive and better educated households.
One of the agricultural staff complained that in his 100 households there was only one which had an exotic grade cow, and that there should have been several more if the sample had been representative. In reality, however, there was only one exotic grade cow for every 200 households in the area, so that the surveyor had in fact only a 50:50 chance of getting a grade cow at all.

A home economics worker said that she was appalled at the poverty she had encountered among her sample. On two occasions she had burst into tears at what she found. She had not known that there was such misery in the area ("These people do not come to my meetings"). Now it is possible that this was an atypical case, although it is more likely, in my view, that the anti-poverty biases affect local-level staff as well as others, and that such staff generally underperceive deprivation in the areas where they work.

The second example is from Sri Lanka. After observing how the houses of the poor are physically hidden from the core of the villages they studied, and how public officers appear not to see them very often, Moore and Wickremesinghe continue (forthcoming:98):

> Although most of the rural population....are poor and dependent in part or whole on wage labour, one fears comments of the nature: "Of course, most of the people around here have some job or little business in Colombo."

The implication is one of other incomes and modest well-being, which might be true of those who were better off, and with whom there was contact, but scarcely true of those who were poorer and with whom there was no contact.

In the third example, a senior official in a ministry in a capital city stated that in his rural home area no one ever went short of food. But a social anthropologist working in the area reported that during the annual hungry season, women were interviewed who said they had not eaten for three
days. There was food in the shops nearby.

Perhaps what we are considering here is a worldwide phenomenon, as marked in rich urban as in poor rural agricultural society. Compared with others, the poor generally are unseen and unknown. Their deprivation may then be worse than is recognized by those in positions of power and influence.

Finally, as we may note, additional factors often missed by rural tourists, local-level staff and even researchers. It is not just a case of the invisible poorer people; it also involves other nonvisible elements: international influences on rural deprivation; social relations (patron-client, indebtedness, webs of obligation and exploitation); and trends over time. The very act of being in a rural area and trying to learn about it biases insights and interpretations towards what can be seen, and the observer's specialization then increases the likelihood of partial diagnoses, explanations and prescriptions. Poor people on disaster courses may not be recognized. A nutritionist may see malnutrition but not the seasonal indebtedness, the distress sales of land, and the local power structure which generates it. A doctor may see infant mortality but not the declining real wages which are driving some mothers to desperation, still less the causes of those declining real wages. Visibility and specialization combine to direct attention in rural development to simple surface symptoms rather than deeper combinations of causes.
IV. REMEDIAL ACTION

What, then, can be done? To suggest remedial action implies the judgment that it is bad not to perceive the nature and extent of rural poverty. This assumption might be challenged on several grounds. It could be argued that it is not necessary to know more about the poor because of trickle-down mechanisms -- "Everyone gains from growth"; because directing resources and attention to the poorer has a high opportunity cost -- "We can do more for less for the less poor"; because indigenous social institutions adequately take care of the deprived -- "The poor look after their own"; because of historical inevitability -- "Whatever will be, will be"; or because the effort is useless -- "We know it can't be done." Each of these points could be debated at length. Perhaps it is enough here to note them, to disagree, and to recognize that they conflict with the philosophy and aims of most rural development, which has the stated purpose of reaching and helping those who are poorer. The World Bank has defined rural development as involving "extending the benefits of development to the poorest among those who seek a livelihood in the rural areas" (World Bank 1975:3). It is difficult to envisage how initiatives in such rural development can be effective unless those responsible for policy, planning, implementation and evaluation have knowledge and understanding of those poorest people. It is in this spirit that the following suggestions for remedial action are made.

Remedies require changes in cognition and behavior. This process involves not just learning in the sense of adding what is known but structural cognitive change. This, in turn, involves mental constructs and concepts, ways of seeing and understanding the world, and especially ways of seeing and
understanding poverty. How cognitive and behavioral change interact, and how they can be manipulated is a subject extensively treated in psychological literature, much of it concerned with psychotherapy.1/ Three points can be noted. First, even those unsympathetic to behavioral approaches concede that the manipulation of rewards and sanctions can have a powerful influence on behavior. Second, for changes in cognition and belief, group approaches appear to be more effective and more cost-effective than many others. Third, public statements of intention, attitude or belief made among peers have a rather strong tendency to influence subsequent behavior and cognition. These points have been incorporated in some of the suggestions which follow.

A. Tactics for Tourists

The earlier discussion of rural development tourism was negative, itself a bias. The point is not to attack or prevent it but, rather, accepting it as necessary, to improve it. Readers reflecting on their own experiences and techniques will have noted how often and how well they have avoided or broken away from the tendencies described and how often, willingly or not,

1/ By way of entry into some of the literature, see Feldman 1966; Mahoney 1974; and Kanfer and Goldstein eds. 1975. There is a rich range of techniques in both humanistic and behavioral psychology. Techniques in behavioral psychology are now often described as behavior modification, and rely on the manipulation of rewards and sanctions. While raising ethical questions, behavior modification makes claims to be rapidly effective for some purposes (Bootzin 1975; Azrin and Foxx 1977). More generally, the range of techniques for achieving change can be illustrated by the thirteen chapter headings in Helping People Change (Kanfer and Goldstein, eds.). The techniques are: relationship enhancement; attitude modification; cognitive change; model simulation and role-playing; operant; fear reduction, aversion; self-management; self-instructional; expectation; hypnosis and suggestion; group; and automation. I make no pretense to have reviewed this literature. But it is worth pointing out that it exists and that it may contain usable ideas.
they have been trapped by them. It is encouraging to remember the example of Wolf Ladejinsky. A man of wide experience, he carried out two brief field trips in India in 1969, at the age of 70, and wrote them up in the *Economic and Political Weekly* (Ladejinsky 1969a and b). He visited the Punjab and the Kosi area in Bihar. His methods were mixed, and he used surveys and official statistics as well as tourism. He had the skill and experience to see through, at that date, to the ironies and ills of the Green Revolution: "The new agricultural policy which has generated growth and prosperity is also the indirect cause of the widening of the gap between the rich and the poor" (1969a:13). What others, years later, plodded to document to two decimal places, he detected convincingly in a week or two, exposing, decisively and without delay, the major trends and implications.

For lesser mortals, such achievements may be out of reach. But for rural visits concerned with poverty there are tactics which help. If these, once stated, are obvious, to the point of banality, I can only say that it is remarkable how often they are ignored, at least by myself. They are:

- **Offsetting the Anti-poverty Biases.** Urban, tarmac and roadside biases can be countered by going further afield and by walking away from roads; project bias by visiting not only projects but other areas near them, or by nonscheduled stops; biases of personal contact by deliberately seeking out the poorer people, by making a point of meeting women, by taking time to seek out those who are sick at home and not at the clinic, by asking about those who have left or who have died; dry season bias by visiting during the rains, or at
least asking about the worst times of the year; the biases of politeness and timidity by breaking away from the courtesies and making it clear what is sought; professional biases by seeking, through introspection, to see the limitations imposed by professional conditioning, by trying to widen spans of perception, and by asking open-ended questions.

- **Staying Longer.** In many ways the poorer people are at the end of the line. They take the longest to reach; they are the last to speak; they are the least organized, the least articulate and the most fearful. They often keep a low profile. Some are migrants. In visits that are rushed, they are the people least likely to be encountered. It is after the courtesies, after the planned program, after the tourist has ceased to be a novelty, that contact becomes easier. As we have seen, rural development tourism is vulnerable to a host of delays and disasters which reduce the time available. The serious "poverty watcher," to use Mick Moore's phrase (1979), must allow plenty of time in one place. It helps to spend the night, to talk after dark, unhurriedly, and to eat together if it can be done unexploitatively.

- **Being Unimportant.** The cavalcade of cars, the clouds of dust, the reception committees and the protracted speeches of the VIP's visit generate well-known problems. By contrast, the visitor who comes simply, by bicycle or on foot, fits more
easily and disturbs and distracts less. Unscheduled visits, walking and asking about things that are seen, planning not to have a special program, and avoiding the impression of having influence over benefits which a community might receive, all reduce the dangers of special or misleading responses and impressions.

- **Listening and Learning.** If a tourist believes that there is nothing to learn from rural people, much is lost even before starting. A reversal of roles, with the outsider as a listening and learning pupil, is needed. Closed questions impose meanings; open-ended questions and discussions lead into areas which the visitor had previously not known of and could not ask questions about. There is much to be discovered about what rural people know, but arrogance and consciousness of status all too often prevent it from being learnt.

B. **Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA)** 1/

Rural appraisal by the urban-based professional is often inefficient. The trade-offs between the cost of information-gathering, and the quantity, accuracy, relevance and actual use of information are badly managed. Appraisal is often either "quick-and-dirty" or "long-and-dirty," where "dirty" means

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1/ For a review of a workshop on RRA held on October 26-27, 1978, see Barnett 1979. Many of the papers of a subsequent conference on RRA, held on December 4-7, 1979, are listed in the references in Chambers 1980.
'not cost-effective.' Uncritical rural tourism is often quick-and-dirty, with the biases noted. But, equally, the twin manifestations of long research, that is, the extensive questionnaire surveys with dispersed investigators collecting mountains of "data," and the prolonged total immersion of classical social anthropology, are both quite often long-and-dirty. The challenge is to search for more cost-effective "fairly-quick-and-fairly-clean" techniques, using the principles of optimal ignorance and proportionate inaccuracy.1/

Some of these techniques have been collated elsewhere (Chambers 1980). Three are of particular relevance for an orientation towards poorer people. First, key integrating indicators may be used to assess poverty and to identify poorer people. They may be appropriate either for showing the relative poverty of an area or of a group, or within the area or group for identifying those who are poorer. Quality of housing is frequently referred to. Others include tangible assets (tools, beds, cooking utensils, clothing). Low birth weights of children also conflate several aspects of deprivation. Inventories or sales of soap have been suggested (Honadle 1979) as indicators of changes over time in poverty or prosperity in an area. Indicators such as these, appropriately verified, may be used to avoid more detailed, expensive and long-drawn-out research. Second, key informants -- social anthropologists, social workers, leaders of poor groups, university students doing field research -- can help efficiently to implement shortcuts in long investigations. Third, combinations of group appraisal, with teams of investigators changing partners and then

1/ The principle of proportionate inaccuracy is that costs should not be incurred to achieve greater accuracy than can be used.
discussing their findings each evening, may provide an especially efficient method for maintaining commitment and learning about the poorer rural people.1/

The relevance of RRA lies in its capacity for releasing time from excessive data collection so that it can be used for more contact with, and learning about and from, those who are poorer. It may be a key to overcoming the endemic problems of shortage of time which shut the poorer people out. More time could be used to let them in. There are dangers of occurrences of the obverse of Parkinson's law -- of time shrinking to fit work -- but awareness of these dangers might reduce their incidence. Techniques of RRA, carefully developed and used, should have a part to play in improving awareness and understanding of rural poverty.

C. In-Service Research as Training

Unless there is a powerful countervailing ideology, in-service training is liable to reinforce elite preconceptions and stereotypes about poverty, insofar as poverty is considered a subject at all. The rather mixed and often disappointing experiences with public sector training for management in developing countries (e.g.; Stifel et al. eds. 1977) might lead one to premature pessimism. There may be more room for maneuver, despite elitist biases, than is currently recognized. One set of possibilities is that of incorporating poverty-related research into sequences of in-service training. Three suggestions will now be made.

1. Surveys. The use of surveys for generating systematic knowledge has obscured their value for training. Simple but systematic surveys can be a learning tool for those who carry them out. Random sample surveys, as in the example from Western Kenya already cited earlier, if followed by discussion,

1/ See papers by Hildebrand (1978, 1979a, 1979b) for pioneering applications in appraisal for agricultural research.
may enable staff to form a more balanced view of an environment. Surveys with target populations of those who are especially deprived could be used to correct imbalanced views in a more direct and pointed way. Well-designed techniques for exploratory and reconnaissance surveys can also provide new insights (see e.g.: Carruthers 1979; Collinson 1979; Hildebrand 1979a). Familiarization for project staff might be achieved efficiently through quick surveys, perhaps focussing on key indicators and on a few in-depth case studies (Chambers 1978). For correcting biases of perception and for learning about the condition and problems of the poorer people, surveys have much to recommend them.

2. Poverty-focussed Research. In-service training might require participants to carry out more detailed and focussed research on poverty. Many suggestions can be made. An illustrative list comprises:

- Family case studies: a day in the life of a landless household, how a poor family survives the hungry season, etc.

- Applications of the critical incident approach, 1/ in which respondents mention significant incidents in their life and work, which are then discussed and explored. For poor families, attention might be directed towards contingencies and the previously mentioned ratchets of impoverishment.

- Exploring practices, knowledge and attitudes relevant to programs (health practices and beliefs, practices affecting fertility, agricultural activities, etc.).

- Nonusers and nonadopters: seeking out and trying to understand the problems and attitudes of those who do not use services and who

1/ See Montgomery et al. 1975 for an application of this approach to defining training needs for the management of development projects. With rural poverty, it could be used comparatively and inductively to identify anti-poverty measures and their relative priorities.
do not adopt new practices.

For such research, good rapport is needed, and this may require village residence. This has been practised by the Peace Corps in some countries as part of induction, and could be much more widely used to include officials on in-service training.1/ The quality of insight gained might be very variable. Ideally, those taking part would be enabled to make a complete mental reversal and to see the world, even if temporarily, the other way round, from the point of view of poor people, from the bottom up.2/

3. Groups, Workshops and Seminars. Both surveys and poverty-focussed research may have greater long-term impact on cognition and behavior if they are part of a sequence of group activities. Before a survey or poverty-focussed research took place, public commitment could be sought from participants, and combined with a discussion of objectives, methods, and problems anticipated. After the survey or research, subsequent workshops or seminars with reporting back, discussion, and comparison of findings would serve to elicit and strengthen changes which participants were experiencing. A practical policy orientation, including group commitment to subsequent action, should also reinforce and build on the changes. Of particular importance might be not only a new understanding of why poor people do not use services or adopt practices, but also subsequent program changes taking those reasons into account.

D. Games and Role-Playing

Games and role-playing are underdeveloped approaches for understanding poverty. There are, however, examples where participants learn by playing the parts of poorer people. OXFAM has developed two games. The first is a

1/ Objections to village residence can be expected. A senior UN official to whom this was suggested said that the health risks to his staff would be unacceptable.

2/ For a social anthropological example of this sort of reversal, see Mencher 1975.
Poultry Game which aims at understanding the difficulties of a farmer in a village in the developing world (and which has players as both farmers and laborers, with the laborers at a disadvantage: they do not have fenced runs). The second is a Poverty Game in which players group as villages, make seasonal crop decisions, are subject to contingencies determined by cards (as with the "Chance" pile of cards in Monopoly), and are exposed to malnutrition and disease. Dowler and Elston (1979), building on the work of Chapman (1973, 1974), have devised a Green Revolution Game in which postgraduate students in human nutrition play farmers who make seasonal decisions concerning crops, fertilizers, pesticides, and longer-term investment, in conditions of uncertainty; outcomes are mediated by a small computer program developed from Chapman's empirical data from Bihar.

Despite these examples, the potential of games for generating insight into the life, problems and attitudes of poor rural people appears largely unrealized. The Green Revolution Game developed at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine appears to have been not only popular but also revealing to the participants: some players, for example, have become landless through bad luck or bad decisions and have had to survive by hiring out their labor to those with land; while others have benefited, again through luck or good judgment or both, from land concentration. One possibility is that participants in in-service training should create their own poverty games on the basis of information gained through their own research, and should then play them. It should be possible to build into such games aspects such as indebtedness, malnutrition, infant mortality, the nonuse of services and the like. On reflection, it is astonishing that such approaches to learning are not widely used -- in public administration training, in universities, and in courses for the staff of aid agencies.
A further possibility is playing games with rural people themselves. In Ecuador, a simulation game called Hacienda has been developed and used as a complement to the "consciencization" of campesinos (Smith n.d.), and can hardly have failed also to educate those who devised and introduced it. Indigenous games can also provide points of entry to help outsiders learn from rural people (Barker 1979). Games can be used to elicit the mental constructs of different groups of people and the ways in which they construe elements of their environment. In Sierra Leone, Paul Richards has used a technique based on Kelly's personal construct theory. This is the triads test,\(^1\) in which respondents are presented with elements (often objects) in groups of three and asked to pair two on the basis of similarity and separate the third on the basis of difference. Repeated for different groups of three from a population of elements, this elicits respondents' constructs, and reveals how different people view the same objects. In Sierra Leone, weeds were presented to University botany and geography students, to farmers and to agricultural extension trainees. The constructs of the university students reflected a preoccupation with morphology and Linnean taxonomy. Those of the farmers brought out difficulties of clearing and secondary medical uses. The surprise came with the extension trainees. Richards reports that they:

produced grids almost identical to those of the university students with constructs such as root/non-root; round leaf/multiple leaf; hair on stem/no hair on stem; hairs on leaf/no hairs on leaf predominating. This proved to be of significant "diagnostic" value, leading to a spontaneous "seminar" by the trainees on how they would communicate with farmers if their "scientific" approach to farming made them think in textbook botanical terms rather than in terms of farming utilities. Tentative action proposals for syllabus development and for studying alongside the farmers were beginning to emerge at the end of the period.

(1979:32)

\(^1\) For further techniques see Fransella and Bannister 1977.
There may be other approaches from psychotherapy which could also be used to enable those working on rural development quickly and effectively to understand the construct systems of rural people.

A final suggestion is that of simulations with role-playing. One variant is theater, dramatizing common events or crises for poor people. Another is for role reversals, for people who are powerful to play the parts of those who are weak. Dramatizing events such as encounters between officials and poorer rural people may enable spectators to "look in on" and see in a new way, from the other party's point of view, situations which are a commonplace of their work.

E. Reversals: Learning From And Working With

Running through many of the above suggestions is the theme of reversal: reversing the positions and insights of urban against rural, educated against noneducated, rich against poor, and powerful against weak. Perhaps the most significant reversal is in the roles of teacher and pupil, with rural people acting as teachers and outsiders as pupils. This reversal conflicts with the assumptions and conditioning of modern education and professional training which imparts the prejudice that modern scientific knowledge is not only superior to indigenous technical knowledge (ITK), but also invests superior status and authority in those who are its bearers. In the words of the Bible (Ecclesiastes 9:16) "....the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard."

Yet there has been repeated evidence of the validity of ITK, as in the case of intercropping where indigenous technology has proved superior to that of agricultural scientists (Belshaw 1979). A first step is to recognize that rural people often have much detailed knowledge, their own conceptual categories, and their own systems of meaning, and that there is often much to learn both about
and from these entities. Indeed, it is ironical that in many environments the most easily acquired knowledge that would be new to the modern scientific network is often that which those who have been educated are least likely to recognize, acquire, or write up: the knowledge of rural residents themselves.

The case must not be overstated: ITK is superior in some respects and some fields, and modern scientific knowledge in others (see Richards 1979 for an analysis). But ITK is now known to the outsider until an attempt is made to find it out, and that attempt is often not made.

"Learning from" can sometimes be made most effective by "working with." This process can be best illustrated from agriculture. Recognition of the rationality of the behavior of small farmers (earlier thought to be primitive, conservative, and backward), acceptance by agricultural scientists of small farmers as professionals and colleagues, and collaborative experimental work on farmers' fields with farmers, are all notions that are spreading. A further step, taken by a few, has been to work at farm tasks with farmers in their fields. Richards (1979) has remarked on the value of this practice as a learning process. In Peru, Hatch undertook it systematically through the many operations of maize cultivation, hiring himself out to farmers as an unpaid laborer on the condition that they would teach him the task to be performed.

The scheme worked beautifully. Most small farmers took to their role as teacher very conscientiously. Rather than waiting to respond to my questions, they often volunteered task information I would never have known enough to inquire about. In fact, most of the information I gathered was gained in this way. Hired laborers often proved excellent instructors as well. (Hatch 1976:16)

Hatch found, among other things, that crop labor requirements might be half as much again as those estimated by outsiders (ibid. 11).
"Learning from and working with" is a procedure that may have more potential in agriculture than in, say, health and nutrition, although this is a matter for investigation. But in all cases, unless present rural practices, beliefs and attitudes are sympathetically understood by outsiders, interventions are liable to be misguided. With rural people generally, and with the poorer people in particular, outsiders have to put themselves in the position of humble learners before they can establish how much they have to learn. It may often be more than they expect. Moreover, it is from the poorer people that they will expect to learn least, although it is the poorer people who are the best authorities on themselves.

F. Rewards: Prestige and Promotion

All these suggestions go against the grain. The inherent tendencies of the biases of knowledge and contact, of cores and peripheries, exercise gravitational pulls away from the poorer rural people. Why should those in positions of influence, at whatever level, behave differently? It would be unrealistic to answer that exposure to poverty is likely to be sufficient. The capacity for having eyes that see but minds that contrive to distort, repress and rationalize is, unhappily, one of the greatest human wonders. A major element of any change in cognition and behavior must probably lie in the granting of rewards and incentives. The problems here are daunting. For a few outstanding individuals there are motives of idealism which lead them to work with and for the poorer people. But while such work is regarded as of little professional interest, of low prestige, dirty, polluting, demeaning, disturbing, and unrewarding, only a small minority will take that path. The system of rewards, prestige and promotion has to change if the majority of those concerned with rural development are themselves to change.
There are no panaceas, but suggestions can nevertheless be made. Together, their combined effects should be greater than the sum of their impacts:

- Changes in professional values in the citadels of professionalism. This suggestion refers to professional associations based in rich countries, to the editorial policies of high status international journals, to the textbooks and curricula of universities, to the research priorities of academics, and to the types of research and writing which are valued. Conversion of such cores of knowledge, in the rich countries, is a crucial but under-recognized part of this process.

- Leadership and Rhetoric. Leadership, when politicians and senior officials show by example that they attach priority to the poorer people, has some effect. The language and the rhetoric of development also have an influence; at the least, if they are poverty-oriented, they legitimize the work of those who wish to help the poorer people; more optimistically, they can provide preconditions for shifting programs and bureaucracies towards the poorer rural residents.

- Prestige accorded at the international, national and subnational levels to those who do good work with and for the poor. Nobel Prizes, like that awarded to Mother Teresa, are at one extreme; at the other, recognition can take many forms. And where they do not exist they might be created. Some of those who have innovated with primary health care might be candidates for awards. Invitations to conferences are another form of encouragement,
already practiced, but which might be extended and directed at more of those individuals whose good work has gone unrecognized.

- Career requirements for civil servants to spend some of their time either in remote poor areas or with special responsibilities for poverty programs or for poverty-oriented trainings. This requirement might be used to overcome the widespread practice of the "penal" posting to a poor rural area of an official who for one reason or another is out of favor.

- Initiating village-level projects (as with antyodya in Rajasthan) which identify the poorest households and have programs specifically tailored to their needs, and which then are the object of attention of supervisors and visitors.

- Valuing new types of research and writing. This practice is already happening, but only slowly. Far too little is still known, and less written, at the level of personal or family detail, about the lives and problems of poorer rural people. Family case studies are still quite rare. New styles and priorities in rural research, especially, perhaps, by university students during their vacations, might set new patterns. Further, ITK presents major opportunities for additions to published knowledge.

- Strengthening the poverty-orientation of monitoring and evaluation procedures so that those working on programs and projects increasingly feel that their work will be judged by its impact on poorer people. This would include awareness, during monitoring and evaluation, of those who migrate or die, and those who do not take up services or otherwise benefit (Chambers 1978).
Promotions. This is both critical and difficult. There are those, but they are a small minority, who will devote themselves to work with and for the poorer people without regard to personal advancement or financial benefit. For the great majority, the status and financial incentives of promotion weight heavily. The problems, then, is how to ensure that effective poverty-oriented work is rewarded by promotion. Solutions may have to differ according to political and administrative systems, and may never be easy. But it should not be thought that there is little scope for improvement here. Attempted in isolation, a policy of promotion for good work with and for the poor may seem improbable. Supported by other initiatives and changes in values, promotion might be a strong tool for changing personal priorities and behavior.
V. CONCLUSION

The difficulties of development for and with the poorer rural people of the developing world are immense. No purpose is served by underestimating them. Many biases tilt against them. The enormity of the problems may induce some to despair, cynicism, fatalism, and a search for one big solution. But great problems can be broken down into small parts which can then be tackled one by one. In suggesting that some of these parts are cognitive and behavioral, there is no intention to present a panacea. Cognitive and behavioral change on the part of those who are influential -- political leaders, senior and junior officials, persons from aid agencies, and others involved in policy and implementation -- cannot be expected to come easily. But at least there is room for maneuver. Just how much room there is will become clearer when more experience has been gained. In the meantime, measures to change and reverse thinking and behavior appear well worth exploring as one set of thrusts, perhaps a key one, for reducing rural poverty.
REFERENCES


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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>TITLE OF PAPER</th>
<th>AUTHOR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>400</td>
<td>Rural Poverty Unperceived: Problems and Remedies</td>
<td>R. Chambers (consultant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>401</td>
<td>Levels of Poverty: Policy and Change</td>
<td>A. Sen (consultant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>402</td>
<td>Education and Income</td>
<td>T. King, D. Jamison, A. Berry (consultant), M.J. Bowman (consultant), G. Fields (consultant), L. Lau (consultant), M. Lockheed (consultant), G. Psacharopoulos (consultant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>403</td>
<td>Implementing Programs of Human Development</td>
<td>P. Knight, N. Coletta, J. Meerman, M. Esman (consultant), J. Mbinyo (consultant), J. Montgomery (consultant), E. Rogers (consultant), C. Safilios-Rothschild (consultant), N. Uphoff (consultant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>404</td>
<td>Population and Poverty in the Developing World</td>
<td>N. Birdsall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>405</td>
<td>The Effects of Education on Health</td>
<td>S. Cochrane, D. O'Hara (consultant), J. Leslie (consultant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>406</td>
<td>Poverty and the Development of Human Resources: Regional Perspectives</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Human Resource Development and Economic Growth in Developing Countries: A Simultaneous Model</td>
<td>D. Wheeler (consultant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>408</td>
<td>Economic Growth and Human Resources</td>
<td>N. Hicks, J. Boroumand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>409</td>
<td>The Changing Nature of Export Credit Finance and its Implications for Developing Countries</td>
<td>A. Ciauskas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>410</td>
<td>Trade in Non-Factor Services: Past Trends and Current Issues</td>
<td>A. Sapir, E. Lutz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>411</td>
<td>Population Policy and Family Planning Programs: Trends in Policy and Administration</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>412</td>
<td>Health Problems and Policies in the Developing Countries</td>
<td>F. Golladay, B. Liese</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>