

RURAL PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS AS CHANGE AGENTS IN THE THIRD WORLD: THREE CASE STUDIES

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Abstract — During the past two decades considerable interest has been shown in the use of primary school teachers as change agents — rural *animateurs* — in the rural areas of the Third World. The concept is not new. Its origins certainly go back to British colonial administration in Africa, but it has been increasingly advocated as a solution to the pressing problems of rural underdevelopment, illiteracy and urban migration.

This paper examines the theoretical basis of the concept both historically and in more recent writings; examines three national case studies, from Thailand, Iran and Cameroon; and from these seeks to draw general propositions that might have a wider validity.

INTRODUCTION

It has been suggested that in spite of, or perhaps because of, various options and dilemmas facing Third World governments there is a growing sense of realism, even healthy scepticism, about the role education has to play in national development (Husen, 1979; Simmons, 1980; Weiler, 1978). Nevertheless, there is one rather intense and ongoing educational debate that has developed during the past two decades between idealists and realists, optimists and sceptics, over the role that should be accorded to primary school teachers in the rural areas of many developing countries. Realists argue that rural teachers should be trained to perform better their task of transmitting knowledge in the traditional classroom setting before any attempt is made to prepare them for a wider social and educational role in the rural community. The idealists argue that because teachers are 'educated' and have a knowledge of literacy and numeracy and because (invariably) they are government agents, they are ideal persons to undertake leadership roles in rural areas of developing countries as 'rural *animateurs*'. As the World Bank Sector paper on Education in 1974 pointedly noted, 'teachers can also be trained and used as multipurpose agents, e.g. managing cooperatives and doing accounting' (World Bank, 1974). That no such

mention of teachers as 'multi-purpose agents' is made in the 1980 Sector Paper on Education may be an oversight or it may be indicative of a growing sense of official international disillusionment about the extended role accorded to the rural teacher. That this disillusionment is far from universal can be seen from the fact that an increasing number of Third World governments believe that the teacher *has* a role to play in national development beyond that of being a classroom teacher. Whereas in the early 1960s about 16 countries had developed some form of project whereby rural primary teachers were expected to be agents of community development over and above their normal classroom teaching, by the early 1980s, according to UNESCO sources, there were over 40 countries using rural teachers and/or community schools in this way. These range from countries such as China, India, Indonesia, the Phillipines and Thailand in Asia; Argentina, Brazil and Colombia in Latin America; Cuba in the Caribbean; Cameroon, Benin, Botswana, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Sierra Leone and Tanzania in Africa and Iran in the Middle East. As can be seen, their size and political complexion vary widely.

This paper seeks to look at the theoretical basis for the concept of teachers as rural *animateurs*/community development agents in both historical perspective and in more recent

writings; to examine three national case studies — from Thailand, Iran and Cameroon; and from the specific conclusions from these studies to draw general propositions that might have a wider validity.

THE TEACHER AS RURAL *ANIMATEUR*

The idea of the teacher acting as a rural *animateur*, or change agent, is an attractive one and has a long history. The argument is, put quite simply, that the village communities of rural Asia, Africa and Latin America need human change agents who will act as catalysts for community development, who will pave the way for new ideas, new techniques whether of adult functional literacy, health, education or nutrition, water conservation or the use of fertiliser. Agricultural and other extension workers, health workers and even literacy workers have a role but the ideal person who has both the respect of the village elders, the community leaders and the pupils, as well as the trust of the government, is the village primary school teacher. He is to be found in all but the remotest villages, he has been trained (at least theoretically), he is (hopefully) receptive to new ideas and he has the ability to put across ideas or else he would not be a teacher.

Such arguments have been given added impetus by international organisations such as UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank. The Faure Report, 'Learning to Be' (1972, pp. 77-78) for example, saw the role of the teacher as very much an *animateur* role:

The teacher's duty is less and less to inculcate knowledge and more and more to encourage thinking; his formal functions apart he will have to become more and more an adviser, a partner to talk to; someone who helps seek out conflicting arguments rather than handing out ready made truths. He will have to devote more time and energy to productive and creative activities: interaction, discussion, stimulation, understanding, encouragement.

While this had a universal ring about it an influential UNICEF report argued more specifically that teachers in LDCs should serve 'more as guides and coaches to learners rather than as drillmasters and substitutes for a textbook' (Coombs and Ahmed, 1978, p. 35), while Coombs and Ahmed's report on attacking rural poverty (1974, p. 217) came down firmly in favour of using rural primary teachers as change agents:

Rural primary teachers form a potential reservoir of personnel who with guidance and supervision could play a useful role in NFE programmes in their own areas. They could act as analysts and leaders of opinion in the rural scene and help in the articulation of village needs. And, finally, they could lead in bringing constructive change to the primary schools themselves.

That the theory of teachers as change agents is not new should not surprise us. As Sheffield (1979) cynically observed when discussing this topic, 'today's breakthroughs are yesterday's solutions revised' (1979, p.120). Nor should we be surprised that the concept had its origins in the minds of Westerners. Lauglo (1982) has examined the attempts to use rural teachers as community leaders in the USA, UK, France and Scandinavia during the latter part of the nineteenth century and several scholars and practitioners have explored the concept in developing countries (Batten, 1959; Houghton and Treagear, 1969; Sinclair and Lillis, 1980; King, 1976).

Although in recent years much has been made of the term *animateur* as it was developed in French speaking West Africa, most notably Senegal and the Ivory Coast, there seems little doubt that the concept originated in British colonial Africa at the turn of the century. At the beginning of this century, numerous British colonial officials began to consider not only the need to make the school curricula relevant to the everyday needs of indigenous peoples but also to link what happened in schools more closely with community development. British community development programmes 'sought to stimulate self-help actions in selected rural areas to improve health, nutrition, adult education and general community welfare' because British authorities perceived social development as a far more worthy objective than economic development (Coombs and Ahmed, 1978, p.26.)

Following the 1910 Edinburgh Conference of Missionary Societies considerable pressure was brought to bear on the British government and various colonial administrators to develop more practical and realistic educational and rural development programmes (Watson, 1982a). The Phelps-Stokes Commission's reports of the early 1920s added weight to the arguments then prevailing by stressing the need for education to be more agriculturally and vocationally orientated (Beck, 1966; Jones,

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1922) and the Jeanes schools developed in East Africa and praised by Phelps-Stokes were modelled on philanthropic schools for negroes in the southern USA whereby teachers were envisaged as key agents in linking schools with the communities they served and in pioneering new agricultural methods (Berman, 1971). Husband and wife teams were sent to rural community schools to teach basic literacy, numeracy, agriculture, health, home economics and sanitation, a role not very different from that being advocated in many LDCs today.

The famous 1925 Memorandum on Educational Policy in British Tropical Africa which was to influence British colonial educational policy for many years to come stated that the aim of education should be

to render the individual more effective in his or her condition of life, whatever it may be, and to promote the advancement of the community as a whole through the improvement of agriculture, the development of native industries, the improvement of health, the training of people in management of their own affairs.

(HMSO, 1925)

Other statements of policy followed. The 1935 Memorandum on Education in African Communities stressed, amongst other things, the need for community development and for teachers to be used as community leaders in adult literacy, health and agricultural programmes. The 1948 Memorandum on Mass Education in African Society followed this up by also stressing adult education and community welfare programmes, policies which were pursued vigorously in the years between the end of the Second World War and the independence of many countries in the early 1960s. What is interesting to note is that the success of many of these programmes has been called into question. Foster's (1965) work on Ghana is probably best known but Cameron and Dodd (1970) have also highlighted problems thrown up in Tanganyika, and Anderson *et al.* (1976) have more recently challenged the concepts of both community and teachers as community leaders in the African context. Indeed, Cameron (1979) has suggested that Nyerere has idealised the role of the teacher and education in the rural community of Tanganyika in the 1920s in order to justify his programme of Education for Self-Reliance.

There have always been a number of sceptics — or realists — who have argued that demands placed upon the teacher as a rural change agent are impossible to fulfil. Over 20 years ago, for example, Batten (1959), writing about the school and the community in the Tropics, said that 'in the main the schoolteacher can best educate and influence the community by the work he does in and for the school', by organizing community projects and by making what happens in school meaningful to the local community outside. He really saw the teacher's role as a supportive one for community development workers or agricultural extension workers rather than as an innovative one but he recognised, rightly, that the success of either role is dependent upon the support and goodwill of the local members — and leaders — of the community. More recently other writers such as Bergman and Bude (1976), Dove (1980) and Watson (1982b) have added notes of scepticism and uncertainty. Dove, Bergman and Bude argue quite forcefully for the teacher to be allowed to perform his role *qua* teacher more effectively before giving him added responsibilities to fulfil, pointing out that in most rural communities the task of being a teacher is onerous in its own right.

Of all the developing countries, the Philippines has probably made greater efforts to introduce community schools in the *barrios* using teachers as extension workers. The policy has persisted for well over a quarter of a century and while it has been praised officially and internationally some of the most scathing critics have themselves been Filipinos. For example, soon after the Philippines had launched its community education policy the basic philosophy was challenged in no uncertain terms when Orata asked how realistic it was to expect rural primary school teachers

to organise the cooperative society in the village, to improve agriculture, to organise adult literacy campaigns, to run a night school, to dig latrines and pits for the village, to plan houses, to grow flowers, to pour oil on mosquito infected ponds and incidentally to teach his pupils four or five hours a day?

(Orata, 1954, pp. 283-228)

His views went largely unheeded.

More recently, Albarracin (1976) has argued that few teachers are capable of fulfilling the

many roles assigned to them in the official propaganda. The government expects teachers to be teachers in schools as well as being community change agents and assigns them three main roles — a management-facilitative-administrative role, a social role and a community in-reach-out-reach role. Within each role there are listed numerous tasks and duties. It is doubtful if Superman, let alone a humble primary school teacher, could be expected to perform the variety of tasks successfully or effectively.

Given the doubts and criticisms expressed from a variety of sources it is surprising that governments — and official agencies — and theorists persist in arguing that teachers in community schools can be used as effective change agents in the rural areas of LDCs yet a very recent conference held in Dar-es-Salaam was devoted to this concept¹. Why should this be so and why has there been such renewed interest in the idea of teacher as rural *animateur*?

There would appear to be several reasons. The growth in population in many Third World countries has thrown an added strain on to already over-stretched resources, adversely affected by inflation and the impact of the oil price rises of the 1970s. Governments have therefore been concerned to provide alternative educational provision without committing themselves to vastly increased expenditure. Rural-urban migration has created socio-economic problems such as the shanty towns around the major cities of the Third World, and the growing problem of urban unemployment, both of which are potential threats to the political stability of many countries. There is therefore a belief that urban migration can only be prevented if the rural areas can be developed, employment opportunities be generated and villages and provincial towns be made more hospitable places to live in. There is also the recognition that urban areas depend upon their rural hinterland for food; for food production to be increased there needs to be improved agricultural efficiency; for improved agricultural efficiency there needs to be rural economic and agricultural rejuvenation (Jacobs, 1978). Furthermore, there is the recognition, at both national and international levels that for too long the rural areas of the

Third World countries have been neglected and that because a very large percentage of the world's population lives in these areas of socio-economic underdevelopment there is a blot on the dignity of man.

The need to develop the rural areas therefore became something of a battle cry in many countries during the past decade, even though in some countries the demand for rural development has been more in spirit than in action. A few definitions of rural development would therefore appear to be useful if we are to see why the teacher's role is regarded as so important. Weitz for example, regards rural development as crucial to economic development generally:

It is a precondition for advance. Without it there is no escape from the abyss formed by the growing gap between those whose material wellbeing is assured and those threatened by starvation. Rural development is the key to the whole process of development.

(Weitz, 1971)

Coombs and Ahmed have argued that the goals for rural development are

not simply agricultural and economic growth in the narrow sense but are balanced social and economic development with an emphasis on the equitable distribution as well as creation of benefits. Among the goals are the generation of new employment; a more equitable access to arable land; a more equitable distribution of income; widespread improvements in health, nutrition and housing; opportunities for all individuals to realise their full potential through education; and a strong voice for all rural people in shaping the decisions and actions that affect their lives.

(Coombs and Ahmed, 1974)

However one defines rural development and whether it is seen as the spearhead of economic development or as only one part of it, a key element is that of education, whether traditional schooling or non-formal education or both, and a key figure in the process is that of the rural primary teacher. This was recognised by the participants at the Commonwealth Education Conference held in Ghana in 1970 (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1970). It was even more clearly argued by Fergus Wilson in the 1974 *World Yearbook of Education* devoted to education for rural development:

Much has been said in recent years on the topic of ways and means through which the human resources of rural development may be mobilised for progress. Here is an

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area of unlimited potential which in many countries has hardly begun to be effectively served. Attitudes have to be changed, new values created and a general climate conducive to progress established. Both the school system and various kinds of technical training have immensely important roles to play. . . . The task of those who staff them calls for rare qualities of character and technical skill. . . . This is the frontline where the battle for rural progress is to be won or lost. Rural people through the influence of education of many kinds, formal and informal, must be enabled to become active partners in development instead of, as so often heretofore, the passive recipients of good advice.

(Wilson, 1974, p.15)

With such powerful and influential voices raised in favour of the need for reformed education for rural development it is little wonder that many governments have been persuaded by the arguments and have sought to use teachers and schools — frequently designated community schools or what King (1976, p.12) has described as 'the interface between traditional schooling and NFE' — as the instruments for bringing about this rural transformation. Yet how realistic is this approach? What pitfalls need to be watched out for in introducing a scheme for using teachers as rural *animateurs*? In order to better answer these questions it is worth examining three national schemes which have received widespread publicity to see how effective they have been.

THREE NATIONAL CASE STUDIES

(i) Thailand

At about the same time as the Philippines was launching its community schools project the Thai government, with UNESCO support, launched what was believed to be a farsighted, even revolutionary, project whereby teachers were to be trained for a dual role as primary school teachers and as community development leaders. The TURTEP project (Thai UNESCO Rural Teachers Projects) as it was known was launched in 1956. It was designed to provide teachers for the rural areas of north and north-east Thailand who had been trained in the techniques of fundamental education and in methods of teaching children of different levels, ages and abilities as well as in techniques of showing adults and out-of-school youth (dropouts and non-enrollees) how they could

improve the local environment and standards of living in the rural community.

A pilot project was established in Ubol Teacher Training College in north-east Thailand and was linked with 23 rural communities. From 1961 the scheme was gradually extended to other parts of the country with UNESCO providing the experts and UNICEF providing supplies, equipment and transport. Initially the scheme was introduced to help overcome the chronic teacher shortage in the rural communities and to attract teachers to go to those areas with the 'carrot' that they had a key role to play in the nation's development. Gradually however the concept has taken on a wider meaning — that of developing the rural communities in as broad a way as possible using rural elementary schools as community centres and teachers as change agents. While the scheme has been suitably modified for modern Thailand the origins of the approach lie deep in Thailand's educational history when the Buddhist monastic schools acted as focal points for village life (Watson, 1973).

Over and above the basic education course, which is the usual mixture of theory and skill techniques, trainee teachers are given special training in hygiene, rural health, agriculture, practical arts, handicrafts, literacy campaign skills and techniques of community development and recreational planning. The idea is that they spend 50-75% of the day teaching in the school and the other 25-50% working in the community. They are expected to show how local materials can be used in the classroom and to develop a respect for physical labour as well as academic skills. Outside school hours community development activities might include improving ways of earning a living through developing handicraft skills; improving living conditions through health, nutrition and sanitation programmes; and developing civic responsibility and citizen participation through community councils. By the end of training they are expected to be familiar with the problems and realities of working in rural areas and they are expected to be able to develop a role in a rural community as quickly and as effectively as possible.

Although the scheme has now been operational for over a quarter of a century, during

which time it has been extensively modified and improved and although it is often held up as a model of the use of teachers as rural *animateurs* there are a number of weaknesses which have limited its success. The first is the quality of the teachers. Most able Thai students have usually gone into university or college in Bangkok or one of the provincial capitals. Teaching in the rural primary schools is therefore not seen as a career for the most talented young men and women. Many therefore find it hard to live up to expectations of them, namely to teach effectively and to the best of their ability while at the same time undertaking numerous activities out of school in the community.

The second weakness is that while the scheme has official backing and had international organizational support, the fact that it was centrally conceived, planned and supported has meant that, as with so much of Thai education, there has been considerable rigidity in the training schemes. These are more or less the same throughout the country and a heavy emphasis is placed on theoretical studies. The language of instruction is the central Thai dialect, although the language of the community may well be one of the regional dialects or even a tribal language. Herein lie potential difficulties for misunderstanding and mutual suspicion or mistrust. Likewise, until recently, the curriculum used in school has not necessarily been flexible enough for the teacher to adapt to community needs since until the fourth National Educational Development Plan (1977-82), which has made provision for regional variations according to local needs, the curriculum in all schools throughout the country was the same.

A third weakness has been that although the ostensible aim has been to improve life in the rural areas for rural villagers there have been too few attempts to link up programmes of rural development with vocational or employment opportunities. This was a criticism made by Coombs and Ahmed (1974) of many of Thailand's NFE programmes and is not just related to the TURTEP scheme. One reason for this is undoubtedly the degree of bureaucratic confusion at both national and local levels. While the rural teacher programme comes under the auspices of the teacher training

department of the Ministry of Education there are at least 17 other departments, ministries, including those of Agriculture and the Interior, and paragonment agencies involved in NFE and rural development programmes throughout the country. Inevitably there is a lack of co-ordination and integration at the planning and implementation levels.

The fourth and fifth weaknesses, and perhaps the most fundamental ones, are psychological and are concerned with perceptions and attitudes. Several observers have argued that Thai villagers, especially far away from Bangkok, have rejected government school and secular learning because this did not accord with their ideas of the moral and religious functions of education as perceived by the village communities and village elders (Hanks, 1958; Terwiel, 1977). Gurevitch (1975) on the other hand has cast a different perspective on the attitudes of village communities towards rural primary teachers and certainly towards teachers being used as change agents. He has shown that because teachers are civil servants and hence agents of central government they are viewed with suspicion in the eyes of most villagers. Moreover, because they are frequently young, are outsiders from the village community, have been educated elsewhere and may speak a different dialect, not only are they regarded as of less importance than the village headman or local abbot of the nearby Buddhist monastery, but they are not considered as having a community role outside the school setting.

This is an important psychological barrier to overcome before teachers can hope to win the confidence of the community leaders, but it presupposes that they want to. Most teachers believe that their educational experience at training college as well as their language skills have set them apart from the village community and many resent working in the rural areas with their limitations on social life, poor financial rewards and limited facilities for educating their own children. The result is that in the north and north-east of the country especially the problem of teacher absenteeism is quite acute. Because they are civil servants, because salary and grades are linked and because grade promotion is largely dependent on the examinations passed, teachers seek every opportunity to

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take extra credit courses as well as opportunities to enhance their salary through moonlighting. Moreover, because they believe, rightly, that promotion in the teaching profession is dependent on their teaching ability in the classroom and on the condition of the school when it is inspected on one of those rare visits from the supervisor or inspector, teachers are much more inclined to devote their energies to classroom teaching and school maintenance than to community development work. Gurevitch's observation is worth noting as it must apply to so many developing countries:

As long as the reward system is structured as it is, and opportunities for advancement in the bureaucracy continue to expand and are perceived as accessible to rural primary school teachers community development programmes depending on the leadership role of the teacher will meet with but limited success.

(Gurevitch, 1975, p. 880)

There is surely at least one lesson to be learnt from this which has a wider application: that reward systems must be modified to take into account the changing role of primary school teachers in the rural community. Others would include the need for better planning and co-ordination at the outset, and the need to consult village leaders and if possible involve them in the scheme from the beginning. To its credit the Thai government has realised this need and during the past few years it has been trying to involve the community leaders more closely in the programme.

(ii) *Iran*

Our second case study is in some ways a rather similar project to that of Thailand and reveals similar weaknesses and problems.

In spite of the propaganda of the present regime in Iran not all that the late Shah Reza Pahlavi did was wasteful or harmful to the needs and interests of the country. In fact there were a number of bold experiments undertaken as part of the Shah's White Revolution, later renamed the Shah-People Revolution (Watson, 1976; Halliday, 1979). Perhaps the most striking experiment and certainly the one that attracted most international attention was that of the creation of the Literacy Corps in 1963 at about the time the International Literacy Centre was established under UNESCO

auspices about 40 miles outside Teheran and at the beginning of the Experimental World Literacy Programme (UNESCO, 1976; Goldstone, 1979).

At that time Iran had a rural illiteracy rate of 86% and the Shah decreed that he was launching a campaign to eradicate rural illiteracy. As part of the crash programme he launched his Literacy Corps made up of secondary school leavers who could opt to spend part of their national service working as teachers in the rural villages of Iran. As in Thailand the immediate need was to meet the shortage of rural teachers but gradually the scheme was extended to include literacy work and extension work programmes. After six months of intensive training which included rural sociology, hygiene and methods of teaching reading and writing in addition to basic military training, Corps members spent the next eighteen months in rural areas helping communities to build and establish primary schools teaching youths and adults alike the rudiments of numeracy and literacy in Farsi, the national language. After 1968 it was agreed that girls could also enrol and in 1969 a Women's Education Corps was also established. It became a common sight to see young men and women of the Literacy Corps dressed in khaki uniforms teaching reading and writing in remote villages in Iran.

Before the downfall of the Shah over 60,000 villages had been affected and at least 750,000 people had been made 'literate'. Because of the favourable reaction to the Literacy Corps, a Health Corps for para-medical work and an Agricultural Extension Corps were also established. Collectively they became known as the Revolutionary Corps and offered an integrated approach to rural development. In this case teachers were in a leadership role as teachers but in a supportive role as community change agents. On the other hand they were not involved in the programme as a career but as part of national service, which meant that their service in the rural areas was of limited duration. On completion of their national service Corps members were encouraged to continue their training as doctors, extension workers and teachers at the Revolutionary Corps University in the hope that they would continue their career in the rural areas. While many Corps

members undoubtedly did become involved in community development work as part of their career it has not proved possible to ascertain the percentage or the number of Corps members who have done this.

While the impetus, and some funding for the project came from UNESCO it was largely the Shah's idea. As a result it had not only official blessing but also official support and because it was a bold conception and because it provided an alternative to routine military service it attracted many young people especially from the urban areas. Officially it was a great success but there were a number of reservations or weaknesses about the scheme.

Firstly, it was a short-term solution to a long-term problem and it failed to tackle the underlying problems of Iran's rural underdevelopment. Many of the teachers saw the scheme as an easy alternative to military service while the government saw it as a means of getting teachers on the cheap. Secondly, because it was centrally conceived it lacked flexibility, it failed to take into account the different circumstances and conditions prevailing in different parts of Iran and it became bogged down in bureaucratic inefficiency at the centre. Lines of communication between the centre and the rural areas were inordinately cumbersome and several ministries were involved in training and supporting the Revolutionary Corps.

Central control also led to a further problem. The curriculum, syllabuses and teaching methods used for training were uniform throughout the country. They failed to take into account the many tribal differences of Iran's population and failed to introduce different approaches to instruction. This is most clearly evidenced in the medium of instruction. All Corps members were instructed in Farsi and were taught to use Farsi, but although it is the national language it is spoken only by a minority of the population as their mother tongue, a situation that became abundantly plain in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution and the threat of the linguistic breakup of the country. Surprisingly, little attempt was made to resolve the linguistic difficulties or to link functional literacy with new employment opportunities. One result which must surely call into question the official version of the

programme's success is that in 1975 rural illiteracy rates were still very high — 60% for men and 90% for women (Halliday, 1979).

A fourth weakness was undoubtedly the quality of the teachers. Many of them were townspeople serving in rural areas with which they were unfamiliar and with which they were often out of sympathy. Because they were only given six months of training in teaching techniques alongside their military and other training they could not be made truly proficient teachers of literacy and numeracy to both adults and children, let alone imparters of other knowledge. Moreover, there was a striking lack of continuity because while Revolutionary Corps members might serve in a rural community for eighteen months, once it was assumed that the programme had been completed little attempt was made to consolidate the achievements by sending further Corps members.

The fifth and most interesting problem, however, was a social/psychological one not dissimilar to that found in Thailand. Not only were Corps members seen as representatives of an unpopular government but because they were doing national service they came under the control of the Ministry of Defence and wore military uniforms. As a result there was frequent non-cooperation on the part of many villagers who resented both the army control and government interference. These were not insuperable problems but the chances of reform were overtaken by events. However, as far as can be ascertained in the chaotic conditions prevailing in the new revolutionary Islamic People's Republic of Iran, the Revolutionary Corps continues to exist, though in a different form. Teachers are expected to explain the revolution to the villagers as much as they are seen as agents of rural development.

(iii) *Cameroon*

Our third case study comes from Cameroon in West Africa. Here a slightly different approach has been developed to the use of teachers as change agents in rural areas. Efforts have been concentrated on training and retraining rural primary school teachers to use new and reformed curricula designed to make schooling more relevant to life in the rural areas

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and to prevent the drift to the cities. In other words teachers have been seen as change agents through the application of curriculum development (Greenland, 1981).

As with the two aforementioned schemes the IPAR scheme (Institut de Pedagogie Appliquée à Vocation Rurale) which began in 1969 did so as a result of external funding from UNDP and UNESCO for the Rural Teacher Training Programme (ENIR) that had begun in 1967. Much has been written about the IPAR scheme (e.g. Lallez, 1974; Bergman and Bude, 1976) but as Greenland (1981, p. 2) has observed

A number of visitors to IPAR-Buea have written such glowing accounts of the project that anyone who has actually worked there would not recognise them at all.

The aim of IPAR, launched in a blaze of publicity by the President of Cameroon and written up in such glowing terms in numerous government and UNESCO publications, is to promote reform of primary education in the social, economic and cultural context of a country where 80-85% of the population live in the rural areas, or, in the words of officialdom 'to enable the government to determine the most effective means of achieving its objectives of adapting the primary education system to the social and economic realities of the country'. IPAR is concerned with ruralising education, with adapting education to the realities of this essentially agricultural country . . . to afford young men and women a chance to enter the labour market according to their capabilities with the benefit of up to date training' (Yaonde, 1973). In practice it has been an attempt to use schools as community centres and teachers as change agents teaching both adults and young people alike in the hope that young people will be persuaded to stay in the rural areas and that adults will learn new techniques.

According to the first director of IPAR, M. François Moudouru, at the time of the launching of the scheme,

ruralization of education is to give the content of education practical significance, to orientate knowledge towards useful action, to open the child's mind, to prepare him for permanent education and individual or collective initiative . . . to teach him to know his environment, to love it . . . to accept techniques which will help him transform his environment with a view to a better life.

(Yaonde, 1973)

In order to try to achieve these aims emphasis has been placed on initial training and retraining of teachers, 80% of whom were untrained at the end of the 1960s and on the school environment — new approaches to teaching methods, reform of curricula, textbooks, syllabuses and materials, use of locally produced equipment such as benches, desks, blackboards and involvement of the community in building, maintaining and financing new types of school buildings. It was intended to move the syllabuses away from the traditional French encyclopedic approach towards developing attitudes of mind that emphasised an inquiry approach and independent thought while at the same time relating it to the realities of Cameroon rural life. The environmental studies course for example stresses the local environment as a major teaching aid and teachers are expected to be flexible in their approach and in the use of local resources. At the same time they are expected to be able to develop new farming techniques and to initiate new craft programmes.

The aims and conception of the IPAR scheme have been very laudable. The government had apparently learnt from previous mistakes, most notably an unsuccessful rural development project in the Bonjongo area of West Cameroon which failed because parents still, rightly, considered academic education to be the only true avenue to success through the examination system and because local officials were only halfhearted in implementing the schemes. Thus when IPAR was launched it had the full support of the government, at least on the surface, as well as residential support. Village headmen, local administrators, head teachers and teacher trainers were involved in the initial planning stages. However, as with the other schemes examined, there are some very serious reservations.

Although the project was hailed as innovative it was really only an extension of similar projects tried in other parts of West Africa during the colonial period. There were no pilot projects and the scheme was applied nationwide regardless of appraisal problems or difficulties. It has failed to prevent the drift away from the rural areas to the towns and cities. By the mid-1970s 55% of primary school leavers were still leaving their community either

in pursuance of further education or in search of employment. It has also failed to win over the confidence of rural people, let alone inspire many of the teachers involved. Why?

The plan was nationally conceived with the result that the curriculum was standardised and uniform and the teaching was standardised. As a result it failed to take into account the enormous geographical, climatic and cultural diversity of the country let alone make allowances for the different rural communities with their different power structures. There has been a considerable degree of bureaucratic confusion with rapid staff turnover. There has been uncertainty as to the real levels of official commitment to the programme. There has been rivalry between French speakers and English speakers. Disagreement between different aid agencies has exacerbated the problems. There has been little attempt to develop other sectors of the rural economy so that new educational programmes could be integrated into a rural development package. There are several reasons for this. According to Greenland (1981) wholehearted support for IPAR threatens vested interests. Too much money diverted to the rural areas would mean less for the urban areas where the influential middle classes reside. Other ministries involved in rural development — the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Rural Development — feel threatened. Many teachers have either been out of sympathy with the aims of the programme or have only given halfhearted support. There are several reasons for this. Where they have tried to teach agricultural and vocational subjects they have not felt competent to undertake the task properly with the result that there have been frequent complaints from rural communities. They have been hampered because of poor conditions in many of the rural primary schools which have made the task of performing basic teaching tasks difficult without having additional community responsibilities. Also, the government has been unwilling or unable to finance the programme adequately. Moreover, many communities have viewed with suspicion teachers undertaking a role beyond their traditional role of classroom teaching.

Greenland has argued, however that the major constraints have been political ones,

because while the Ministry of Education responded to President Ahidjo's call for a 'Green Revolution' in the rural areas by producing the IPAR scheme, it has had no intention of implementing and financing it adequately because not only would funds have had to be diverted from other sectors of the education system but there would also have had to be fundamental changes in the examination structures, reward systems and salary structures. There would also have to be a fundamental shift in thinking to accept a wider role for education in rural transformation than has hitherto been conceded. The result has been, at least since 1977, a greater emphasis on curriculum development and a playing down of the rural development element.

LESSONS LEARNT

What lessons can be learnt from these three examples of attempts to use teachers as change agents in rural development? All three schemes have had international agency backing, were launched in a blaze of publicity, have had official government support, though it must be added, insufficient and unrealistic funding, and have ostensibly been concerned with the problem of rural community development but, while not in any way wishing to minimise the successes of the programmes, it must be admitted that their success has been limited and the official rhetoric has been called into question.

In all three cases there have been administrative political difficulties, unintentional maybe but nevertheless very real, which have complicated matters. Excessive centralisation has not allowed for flexibility, has meant that regional and local variations have been overlooked and that a top-down approach to planning and implementation has been developed. Departmental and ministerial rivalry has added to the difficulties of the task and has not always made it easy to pinpoint responsibility let alone to allocate funds for coordinated rural development programmes using education as only one part of an integrated process. Villagers cannot be blamed for regarding schemes — and the teachers — with some suspicion.

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Not enough grass-roots consultation took place. Only in the IPAR scheme was any attempt made to involve local people, but one suspects that this was rather halfhearted and was more in form than in substance. The results have shown that too little was done to identify possible cultural, psychological or political obstacles that need to be dealt with. In all three examples the language of instruction of the teachers and of the schools has been at variance with the language used locally. Villagers have rightly viewed teachers with a degree of suspicion and even hostility because being government agents they have seen them as some kind of threat. Teachers, on the other hand, have seen their promotion prospects and their professional competence associated with the results of their classroom teaching rather than with community development.

The training afforded to teachers has generally been inadequate. Regardless of the language medium and the centralised curriculum it is not very realistic to expect to train young and inexperienced men and women with techniques of adult literacy and the teaching of young children together with the skills of community leadership for extension work in a matter of only a few months, especially if the instructors themselves are only skilled in certain facets of the training. Moreover, lack of follow-up and logistical support, lack of finance to improve working conditions in the schools, to provide books and equipment, raise teachers' salaries, etc., have not made the task of the teachers any easier. In fact it should be stressed that devising a scheme for using teachers as change agents in rural areas cannot be done on the cheap. If anything, it requires additional expenditure.

Should these conclusions surprise us? Not really. Manalang has shown that even in the Philippine's context, where more effort has been made to develop the rural *animateur* concept than probably any other country, policies have largely failed because of rejection by both parents and teachers:

It was not a spontaneous grassroots movement. For the *barrio*, the ideology of community development was alien. For the bureaucracy, this ideology was politically profitable for it projected an image of concern for the rural masses. . . . For the individual leaders of the move-

ment it was equally profitable . . . but the teachers and pupils experienced no corresponding rewards. On the contrary, they were sometimes criticised for activities not traditionally associated with the school. Teachers were overburdened since they had to add community education to their conventional teaching. *Barrio* people did not respond as favourably and energetically as the bureaucracy had hoped. At times they perceived community school activities as an exploitation of their children, and as an intrusion into a domain that did not belong to the school.

(Manalang, 1977, p. 227)

Above all however, if one considers the working conditions of primary school teachers in the rural areas of many parts of the Third World one appreciates that the demands made upon them are inordinately difficult, if not unrealistic. Some of the political difficulties have been explored elsewhere (Dove, 1980) but the working conditions also leave much to be desired. Schools are often overcrowded, inadequately built, under-provisioned with books and equipment. Teachers are usually underpaid and inadequately trained for teaching in these conditions, where they are trained, let alone being trained for a wider role in the local society. They find it difficult enough to follow the existing syllabus using a framework of textbooks and teachers' manuals but at least they have a degree of security. Remove this security and expect an innovative *animateur* role and many teachers naturally feel frightened. Knowing that promotion prospects are usually dependent on infrequent school inspections, that parents and community leaders as well as inspectors will assess him on grade tests and examination results, the teacher's natural inclination is to pursue a restricted curriculum. Even in Cameroon and Thailand where the curriculum has been 'ruralised' the question of the place of examinations remains unresolved, with the result that they still dictate within school activities.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In spite of reservations expressed in the earlier part of this paper I believe quite strongly that the concept of teacher as change agent is workable given certain conditions. Moreover, it seems inevitable that with the growing problems of urban drift, rural underdevelopment and population growth, and the inability of the

modern sector to grow sufficiently rapidly to absorb the increasing number of school leavers, many Third World governments will be attracted by the idea of using teachers as change agents in the process of community development. In order that new programmes may avoid some of the mistakes outlined in the schemes studied in this paper I suggest that the following points need to be considered.

It matters less where the idea originates — central government, national commission, international organisation or individual — than that there is (a) government commitment and (b) detailed planning. Government commitment means a financial commitment. For any programme to succeed it cannot be done on the cheap. Teachers need to be adequately trained and supported and facilities need to be more than second best. Methods of financial support, whether national or local, need to be satisfactorily built into the programme. There is a need to recognise that there will be social and political implications which could well threaten the existing status and vested interests. Successful rural development programmes mean a dynamic for change. Detailed planning must not only recognise that integrating education into rural development programmes is a complex process but must ensure that different ministries which might be involved have some satisfactory system of coordination. From very early on in the planning process community leaders, provincial and local administrators, teacher trainers and teachers likely to be used as models must be involved. Only in this way can local variations and problems be stressed, can political and other potential opposition and suspicion be anticipated and can the purpose of the programme and the role of the teacher be adequately explained.

The tasks expected of rural primary school teachers must be realistic and must be in accord with the expectations of teachers and village leaders. Not only must the training be realistic and of the right duration — six months or a year is hardly sufficient time to train for the teaching of pupils and adults let alone for community development work as well, especially if the trainee's own education has barely been of the minimum duration — but there must also

be revision for adequate inservice training as well.

If the curriculum is to be 'ruralised' examination structures must take this into account in order that able children and their parents in the rural areas do not feel that the new approaches are second rate. If able teachers are to be persuaded to accept their new role in the rural areas they need the reassurance that they will not lose out financially *vis-à-vis* their urban counterparts. Ideally, the reward system should favour these teachers rather than those operating in the more traditional education sector in the towns.

These proposals — government commitment, planning, financial support, administrative coordination, involvement of community leaders, realistic tasks for teachers, reformed examination systems to take into account the new rural curriculum, reformed reward systems — are offered not as any blueprint but as points for consideration in any new programmes that might be initiated. This author at least believes that in this way the chances of teachers becoming rural change agents will be considerably enhanced.

NOTE

1. An international conference on Education for Community Development was held at Arusha, Tanzania under the auspices of the University of Dar-es-Salaam from 12 to 17 April 1982.

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