

can NGOs—that now tend to operate on a small scale—fill the gaps left by faltering governments? Especially in the countryside, can NGOs aspire to create the elements of a system for defeating rural poverty from a thousand disparate elements? Will there be NGOs that will want to tackle these very dynamic, very complex problems? And can NGOs respond effectively without losing the passion, the intimacy of approach, the independence of mind, and the imagination that have made them so unique and valuable?

## **A New Paradigm of Rural Development**

In my view farmers must be central players in my strategy for defeating rural poverty and meeting the food needs of an increasingly crowded world. Their attitudes and limitations are the parameters within which NGOs, scientists and governments must act. They are the key players on the rural scene because what they decide to do with their land and their labor is the most important element in whether or not rural poverty can be defeated and natural resources managed better. Farmers, after all, decide what and when to plant, when to water and weed, when to harvest, whether to leave the farm for part-time work or, as is happening increasingly in every part of the world, whether to abandon rural life entirely and move to the city.

You can have good government policies, more effective incentives and even good rural infrastructure. You can also have good agricultural technology to offer for the farmers' adaptation. But if their attitude towards new opportunities and old risks is not favourable, these other factors seldom come into play, at least in any decisive way.

All this has led me to the conclusion that promotion of participatory rural development centered on the farmer is the surest way today to equitable and sustainable rural development. More and more scientists, NGOs, even governments and development institutions are recognising the validity of this thesis. That is important, but more important is the growing number of farmers embracing community-based development.

Not that community-based farming is so very new. It's been around almost as long as the organised cultivation of plants and animals that we've come to call agriculture. What is new is the farmers' sense that old ways of organising farming are simply not good enough. I find that rural people everywhere are beginning to see this as a fact of life, even though most of them are yet to embrace some form of community-based farming.

Most farmers don't particularly like change. They know that they will have to take most of the risks and provide most of the labour to implement any new ways that outsiders propose. In fact, experience shows that farmers don't willingly change unless and until they believe it will be in their interests and in line with their own aims and limitations to do so.

Much of the failure of government-sponsored and donor-sponsored rural development has come from trying to apply top-down, 'outsider knows best' methods. Even in the recent past it was the expatriate rural 'expert' who called most of the shots. But once the outside 'expert' and the outside financing disappeared, most farmers would resume their old ways.

If the problems of rural poverty had been easy, they would have been solved long ago. The average dirt farmer is not Thomas Jefferson's ideal 'man of the soil'. Poor farmers are survivors and they know their land. We must not idealise them.

Since over half the farmers in the developing countries are women, promoting their welfare must have a much higher priority than almost anyone has so far given it, or in fact has often known how to give. Women farmers in developing countries may be the most overworked and under compensated group on this planet. Their responsibilities continue to grow as men move off the farm for full-time or part-time work in the cities. It's no wonder they welcome the extra labor that a large family provides. It's also no wonder that they tend to be suspicious of almost anything that will mean more work.

## **A New Breed of Rural Leader**

I'm afraid that the above picture of farmers' lives could be considered too negative because it seems to emphasise farmers' desire to avoid risks and change. This does reflect the attitude of a great many farmers. But there are also many others with a brighter vision for their family, their community, their tribe, and their country. Given the right circumstances these are the leaders that most other farmers follow. Many have also become leaders in the NGO movement. It is such people who, with a little outside encouragement, have given impetus to the kind of community-based farming that in many developing countries is the most dynamic aspect of rural life today. Of course, there are always other people with ambitions that go well beyond the farm. Over the years, the best of them have moved on to the cities in search of education, and a richer life, and in the process become part of the urban elite.

Fortunately, there is also a growing number of leaders in the developing countries outside the farming communities who also have broader visions of what rural life can be. Most tend to be people with rural backgrounds. Many of these 'new style' leaders are fighting to entrench democratic values, to secure the rights of people to participate in deciding issues of concern to them, and to hold politicians more accountable for what they do and don't do.

These efforts should logically lead to greater rural empowerment. But rural empowerment is a cause that has not drawn much enthusiasm from urban elites or from the politicians that depend on those elites for support. There are, of course, countries where rural empowerment has moved briskly ahead and where farmers are politically active. The world's largest democracy, India, comes to mind—talk about feisty, politically active farmers and landless people!

There is one important national goal, however, which is not likely to enjoy a high priority with farmers, with most NGOs, or with developing country leaders. It is the promotion of national food security and the need to intensify agricultural production in order to achieve it. In developing countries where I've recently had the opportunity to sound out such attitudes, I've found surprisingly little sense of urgency about food security. And as for agriculture intensification, I have detected very little interest among farmers—even farm leaders. But somehow this will have to change quickly if rural farmers are to be able to feed themselves, let alone feed their cousins in the cities. National governments—and civil society more generally—are neglecting this issue at their own peril!

## **NGOs and the Farmer**

Talk of farmers and their instincts leads me to ponder the instincts of other key players towards the farmer, towards change, and towards rural cooperation. Perhaps my most important point is that I'm convinced that in the years just ahead, non-governmental organisations of various kinds could well do more to help the rural poor to change their lives than any other 'outside element'. With the world-wide decline in the power and relevance of government, the NGO movement is beginning to fill a dangerous vacuum in the supply of rural services that governments had—or should have—offered. Where thousands of NGOs are already working in the countryside, their number is likely to double and triple in the years just ahead.

For the purposes of this paper I will divide NGOs working with or for farmers into two groups: first, advocacy NGOs, national and international—groups that broadly speaking seek to influence rural policy and empower rural people; and second, community-based NGOs—groups that work directly with the farmers and the landless, delivering various kinds of services and helping farmers to organize production. Some NGOs fall into both categories.

## **Community-based Rural Development and the NGO**

As much as I'm intrigued by advocacy NGOs, national and international, I am much more attracted by the potential of NGOs working at the farm level. I believe that more than any other group except perhaps the scientists, NGOs will play a key role in helping farmers achieve productivity levels that will not only raise rural living standards, but will also provide enough food for urban consumers.

But the ability of NGOs to influence independent-minded farmers must never be taken for granted. I return to my basic premise that it is what farmers think is in their own interests and within their own limitations that will determine how they react to NGOs—or anyone else. They tend to be suspicious of outsiders' motives. Like common people everywhere, they are not particularly motivated by what we call national interests—or even to any great extent by humanitarian instincts that go much beyond their village or tribe.

Let us take a quick look at what NGOs have already done to help farmers and the landless better organise their lives. The success of NGOs in promoting community-based farming among the poor is already substantial. However, it's clear that the number of successful community-based efforts must increase from the thousands to the millions. The necessary inspiration and drive for this expansion is not likely to come from the villages, but I am convinced that NGOs—perhaps even new kinds of NGOs—can increasingly step in to fill this gap.

Some pioneering work in organising successful community farming was done by the Ford Foundation through the Sukhramaji project in the Himalayan foothills in India in the 1970s. While the Ford Foundation was proud to have helped build a model, they were not in a position to help spread it. The provincial governments and several development agencies, working with and through the Indian Government, were given that assignment. Unfortunately, in most villages where the new model was tried it failed, largely because none of the responsible government agencies had enough people with the time and the patience to help the villages slowly define their problems and work out solutions.

Since then, however, Indian NGOs have made great progress in promoting community-based farming by building on local traditions of communal cooperation. There are more success stories on the subcontinent than anywhere else I know. Quite often these efforts have been led by village women. In Pakistan, the Aga Khan Foundation has done outstanding work along similar lines.

Some important help in South Asia and elsewhere came from two distinguished British social scientists, Dr. Robert Chambers and Dr. Gordon Conway; I'm proud to say that both now belong to the US Committee on Agricultural Sustainability. The techniques of problem evaluation they use, called in one case 'participatory rural appraisal', are at the same time simple and sophisticated. In one part of the process villagers are encouraged to make rather complicated maps showing how the village land is cultivated, using stones and colored objects to illustrate their points. This allows them to see what resources they have in common and then decide how they can use them better.

NGOs like OXFAM, CARE, and as I noted the Aga Khan Foundation, have helped spread these techniques to some other villages. However, none has had the resources to do this on any large scale. I believe further spread has been limited in no small part by the lack of a different—probably middle level—organisational framework designed specifically to promote scaling up—more on this later.

Another place where NGOs are already assisting farm communities, but can do more, is in helping farmers learn how to process and sell their agricultural products for greater return. Several of our committees' members—Appropriate Technology Incorporated, and World Vision, one of the seminar cosponsors—have done good work here. Better processing is particularly important for tropical products—coffee, tea, cacao, and coconut—where global competition is fierce and where quality control and reliability of delivery are both crucial and often lacking.

Another fascinating new area deserving attention is the production and sale of organic tropical products. Several NGOs that I work with are helping farming cooperatives break into the growing markets for organic products. NGO-sponsored organic coffee cooperatives in Mexico are a good example.

Providing farmers with rural credit is another place where NGOs have already made a big contribution, as was well documented by the micro-credit summit held in Washington in February. I recently saw a directory listing thousands of micro-credit NGOs at work in developing countries. And that is as it should be, because until now the big development agencies have had little success in promoting viable rural credit operations. Farmers everywhere have to depend on credit to keep their families going between harvests. I'm intrigued by the good reports I hear about micro-credit. But we must not allow today's fascination with micro-lending to become a passing fancy or to be seen as an all-around solution to rural problems.

NGOs can help with two other problems that need solving to make rural development more productive; how to provide farmers with crucial inputs and how to ensure that farmers have the rural infrastructure to get their produce to market profitably. NGOs working in countrysides have long recognised that to increase production farmers need access to reasonably priced inputs—fertilisers, improved seeds, and farm equipment. Government supply or subsidy of inputs does not work very well. Reliance on the private sector—usually on small traders that have the incentives to work with small farmers—is usually the best bet.

Providing inputs when the private sector can't or won't is a complicated task for which most NGOs tend to be unprepared. NGOs are essentially non-profit organisations—usually, for better or worse, led by kinds of people very different to the business entrepreneur. However, buyers' cooperatives provide an example of where NGOs do sometimes have a competitive advantage.

Second, infrastructure: without adequate all-weather roads, rehabilitated irrigation systems, and proper market places, storage, and transport, it has proven very difficult for farmers to move from the subsistence or barter phase of development into a market economy. But where this infrastructure does exist, rural development can often move ahead rapidly. For example, I recently visited a previously cut-off area in Cameroon where farmers were able to make a lot of money selling tomatoes to the capital city several hours away, simply because a local politician, as a matter of patronage, succeeded in getting 10 miles of feeder roads upgraded for trucks to pass to a main highway.

A brief note about storage of food products: in recent years, NGOs working in villages have helped substantially reduce postharvest losses. But if production intensifies as it must, a lot more storage space will have to be built. And this job is one that is special enough in each area for NGOs to be able to help.

Can NGOs help with infrastructure projects? With major, expensive projects probably only marginally. Rarely do they have resources or time to help build much more than a few markets or storage facilities—or perhaps help villages build some minor roads. It's just too expensive. This is a job for governments, although in a few places like India the private sector is experimenting with financing roads. At another level, however, farmers and their NGO partners can and often do have a voice about infrastructure projects, for example, by making their views known to governments about where and how roads and markets should be built. And NGOs can at times help persuade governments to make new investment in rural infrastructure.

## **The Scaling Up Challenge**

To my mind the central challenge of rural development today is the scaling up of the kinds of projects that have already proved successful. That encompasses the scaling up of community-based farming, of finding new ways for cooperation between farmers and scientists, of NGO participation in the dissemination of more productive plants and technologies, and yes, scaling up of rural micro-credit lending—scaling up to the point where not only a few thousand farm communities are affected, but millions. This is a complex task, obviously requiring a different approach depending on what is scaled up.

Who is going to take the lead? Developing country governments? So far they haven't. In fact, most governments don't seem to have the will, the money, the right kinds of people, or the necessary confidence of the farmers. How about the bilateral donors? Some like the American and the Australian aid agencies could—and I hope will—help. But as far as I can determine the aid agencies haven't done much on this score yet.

How about the World Bank or the regional development banks? Again, if they will, they can help with financing and by promoting and defending the scaling up

process with developing-country governments. As yet, however, none of the banks has demonstrated the will or the capacity for the detailed work with the thousands of farm communities that such an effort will demand. This will require constant, detailed attention of a lot of people ready and willing to live and work in the countryside for long periods and under conditions that most bank people don't welcome. The kind of people that I think will be most successful will be men and women who have had 'hands on' experience working in the countryside, people like 'graduates' from our American Peace Corps or similar programs, but preferably drawn where possible from developing countries.

True, the World Bank in its new rural and development strategy *is* showing interest in scaling up. To some the degree, decentralisation of World Bank programs to the field will help. And decentralisation is moving slowly ahead. For instance, most Bank programs for Mexico are now run from Mexico City. However, there are limits to how far a highly centralised organisation like the Bank can go.

This leads me to conclude that for the foreseeable future the best bet may be to turn to NGOs, to a series of NGOs, or to a new type of NGO to do the job. Could and would, for example, a large NGO like CARE or World Vision, working with their local allies, be willing to take on this challenge? I have my doubts. I've proposed just this possibility to several of our committee's most conscientious and risk-taking member organisations. While not rejecting my suggestion, each has pointed out the same difficulties. They see real risks, because of the scale of the job, of becoming so bureaucratic as to compromise their much cherished low-key approach to the poor. Nor do they relish getting as close to developing-country governments or to the international or bilateral donors that might provide much of the financing as would probably be needed. In other words, it seems to be just too big a bite.

## **Helping the Farmer: the Role of Advocacy NGOs**

Now let's turn to the rural-oriented, advocacy NGOs and their relations with farmers. Earlier I defined rural advocacy NGOs as organisations that try to influence rural policy, try to make rural life more equitable, or work to empower the farmers and the landless. In many places in the developing world, these groups are regarded as radical by governments which believe they are aiming to change the status quo and therefore to be resisted. In fact, in many developing countries, NGOs are either not allowed to organise and work freely or are co-opted by the government. The situation differs greatly from country to country, but the lesson is that where governments are determined to block the work of advocacy NGOs—and are strong enough to prevail—not much positive happens.

Will government opposition to NGOs change? I think it will, for the NGO movement is quickly becoming a major political force in country after country. But the speed of this change is likely to be a function of how well and how quickly democracy, and civil society more generally, evolve. Civil society, where it thrives in developed countries, still tends to be a predominantly urban and middle-class phenomenon, and so the urban-oriented part of civil society needs to be awakened to the values of partnership with a broader spectrum of NGOs.

Civil society must support the rightful demands of neglected rural peoples, and recognise the importance of promoting rural equity and well-being. In any case, I

believe the evolution of civil society is likely to gain momentum in the rural areas as the 'communications age' moves ahead. NGOs of all sorts—but particularly advocacy NGOs—must gear up to help speed this process. For rural empowerment is likely in the longer run to be a keystone of equitable rural development.

That raises another question: how well do advocacy NGOs work with farming communities? My own experience has shown that relations can vary from very close to very distant and cold. Some NGOs are seen by farmers as self-serving, uninformed about and detached from rural life, and sometimes autocratic. Others work closely and successfully with rural communities. The most successful tend to be ones that are represented by people who have lived and worked in rural areas.

I will now briefly consider the role of international advocacy NGOs, advocacy NGOs from particular industrial countries, and international NGO coalitions. First I will examine their dealings with the development agencies and international agricultural research centres; I chose to discuss this relatively small part of the work of these organisations because I have a chance to observe it in my own day-to-day activities.

Critical oversight of these international organisations by international NGOs and NGO coalitions of development agencies is, in my view, a very appropriate function, especially when national NGOs are too far away to defend their own farmers' interests. But this is only appropriate if these international NGOs keep well informed and stay reasonably in touch with the farmers' groups in the country concerned.

Every day I see signs that NGO influence is growing in international organisations including the development banks. Every international organisation I work with is now at least paying lip service to the principle of consultation with NGOs. Indeed, a good case can be made that outside pressure, exercised in no small part through NGOs, has been a principal force in bringing about important changes in these organisations' rural development practices and policies.

This is especially true for both the World Bank and the international agricultural research centres. In the case of the World Bank, NGO impact has been greater on the Bank's overall policies—openness of documentation, processes for consultation with NGOs, for example—than on Bank policies towards lending for particular sectors or countries. The exception is on Bank lending for big dams, where NGOs have been the major force in persuading the Bank not to fund such projects.

In contrast, there has been comparatively little specific international NGO attention to the Bank's policies and programs for rural development, and even less on rural development projects other than dams and irrigation systems. In the CGIAR's case, very few NGOs have paid much attention to the policies of the CGIAR itself or to the work of particular international agricultural research centres. Again the exception is genetic resources, where CGIAR policies have attracted a lot of NGO attention and more than a little opposition.

To my knowledge only we of the US Committee on Agricultural Sustainability, along with very few other groups such as Australia's Crawford Fund, have kept in regular touch with the work of the CGIAR, the international centres and the World Bank. I would like to see more NGOs or NGO coalitions from other countries develop the capacity to follow in some detail the Bank's work in their own country. But barring greater decentralisation, this requires being in Washington a lot, and

that seldom seems to be practical. For our part, we wish we could—unasked—follow more of the Bank's 100 or so major rural projects for NGO colleagues in other countries, but we only have time to follow particularly sensitive projects at the request of NGO friends.

A final word on international advocacy NGOs: groups like Greenpeace or GRAIN or Friends of the World are examples of NGOs working on one aspect or another of agriculture or hunger. There are many more and their number is growing daily. During the recent Food Summit in Rome, over 100 NGOs with interest in rural problems met and put together an agenda on hunger, food security, and rural development. They also agreed to form a loose coalition to carry forward joint enterprises. Many of these NGOs have work that takes them well beyond rural problems, and each rightly tries to ally itself with local organisations, often its own affiliates. International coalitions tend to come and go—and to vary greatly in their strength and ability to work with national NGOs. But the trend towards more and stronger international NGO action is indisputable and very welcome.

Some countries, such as the USA, are investing more and more political capital in trying to promote 'democracy' and to encourage more active civil societies in developing countries. In the process they are working to strengthen national and local NGOs. So far, I have not found any United States democracy programs that directly focus on rural affairs or on rural empowerment. Again, that may come.

### **The Scientists, the Farmers and the NGOs**

I have left to last NGO relations with scientists and farmers in order to place special emphasis on the subject. Even though help from NGOs for farming communities is very important, the case can be made that the singular gap NGOs can hope to fill may be to act as a channel between organised farming communities and the scientists. Farmers all over the developing world absolutely require a new generation of food plants that are at the same time more productive, more water-conserving, more disease- and drought-resistant, and more nutritious. They also need to know about new combinations of plants that will promote sustainability. They need more cost-effective, more labor-effective, and more sustainable ways to use soil and water. The international agricultural research centres, the national centres and some scientific centres in the industrial countries are pursuing just such research.

While in theory all the CGIAR's international agricultural research centres accept the need to work more closely with farmers and NGOs, I find that even the most sensitive centres still have trouble doing this on a day-to-day basis. For one thing, some agricultural scientists still think of themselves as the farmers' teacher, and not as their partner. Some consider NGOs as bothersome and ill-informed. Some claim that farmers' 'indigenous' knowledge, if not irrelevant, is too diffuse to be of much use scientifically. Also many researchers find it hard to spend the time needed to establish and to sustain a collaborative relationship with farmers and their organisations.

Even so, progress is being made. I'm particularly impressed by the work of the International Potato Center with rural NGOs in Peru in testing and disseminating improved integrated pest management techniques for smallholders. Other centres have programs, but they readily admit they have far to go in bringing their research

into the real world of the dirt farmer. Admittedly, organising closer farm-centre research collaboration presents formidable problems.

But this is one place where I know the right kind of NGO can help a lot more. This will require changes of attitude and mutual confidence-building and information exchange by both the international centres and the NGOs. In the NGOs' case, it will also require a substantial upgrading of their technical capacity. They will also have to improve their knowledge of what technologies farmers want and need—and where in the scientific community those technologies can be found. So far, I've seen few NGOs that fulfil these qualifications.

Under the best circumstances, there remains another huge scientific and technical problem for the farming communities: who is going to help them adapt potentially useful advanced research results to the thousands of ecological and economic situations farmers face? In theory, this is the job of the research systems of the developing countries. And in the longer run I see no answer other than building stronger national—or at least regional—research systems. But, for the present, I accept the views of many agricultural scientists from developing countries, who state that only a handful of national research systems are currently able to apply the adaptation process on the large scale demanded by the urgency of the problems facing farmers.

Can the private sector be expected to handle the problems of local adaptation? Experience suggests that companies, even the growing number of companies that are producing research relevant to tropical agriculture, are not ready to spend money on the adaptation of even their own research unless they see substantial profits from doing so—profits at least in the near- and mid term. Right now this means that while the private sector will pay some attention to the needs of the small but increasing number of more prosperous and 'modern' farmers, they can be expected to pay little or no attention to poor smallholders. This reluctance may change when and if the upgrading of smallholder farming on rain-fed lands gains momentum and smallholders get to the point where they can afford to pay—or pay more—for new agricultural technology.

In late January, I had a fascinating talk with a large American company scouting out just such possibilities. This company is determined to be 'ahead of the curve' on this one. In the meantime they are spending more time and money learning about smallholder farming and in establishing ties with farmers and farm groups.

I have gone into the adaptation problem in such detail not because I believe that most NGOs as presently organised can take on the adaptation problems themselves. Rather it is because I believe that if properly trained they can certainly help many farm communities do at least part of the job. And why not experiment with organising a new type of NGO just for this purpose?

Closely associated with the problem of adapting farmer-tested plants and technologies is the issue of making available already adapted plants, seed systems and methodologies to the millions of farmers who could use them profitably. Again, the theory is different from the reality. The extension services of the developing countries and the private sector should do most of this work, but can't or usually don't.

The World Bank has loaned billions of dollars trying to change this. But basically I do not think top-down government extension has much chance of success. We need effective bottom-up approaches of the kind that are still too rare.

Here again NGOs can help. From late 1995 until late 1996, I was chair of an international NGO committee appointed by the CGIAR. Among other things, we tried to create new links between agriculturally-oriented NGOs and the international centres, in no small part to help with research dissemination. This task of stimulating linkages proved difficult because we didn't know enough about the detailed needs of either specific groups of farmers or the centers. Nor did we know enough about strengths and weaknesses of particular NGOs. The work of the CGIAR-NGO committee is continuing and in time should greatly assist in stimulating better cooperation. The NGO committee is, moreover, taking on another important job: encouraging the CGIAR centres to change their research to reflect a stronger agro-ecological approach.

## **Do We Need a New Kind of NGO?**

So far I've listed a number of unfilled or poorly fulfilled functions, most of which are ones that developing country governments are now—at least theoretically—supposed to carry out. National governments all over the world—even the strongest—are losing strength and NGOs and other parts of civil society are moving in to fill vacuums. We must, I believe, ask ourselves whether the NGO community is strong enough to take over vital rural development functions—and if not, how NGOs can be strengthened to do so.

In this regard, I was intrigued by a list of NGO strengths and weaknesses cited in a recent Asian Development Bank working paper. It is worth reviewing this list because on the 'downside' it suggests places where NGOs need to be strengthened. But on the 'upside' the Bank lists as NGO strengths their rural roots; their linkages to farm communities; their connections with local-level administrators; their 'field-based presence'; their development experience; their administrative flexibility; their freedom from many of the constraints that governments face; their ability to respond quickly to new circumstances and experiment with innovative solutions; their strength in identifying problems overlooked by other people working on poverty and development; and—a sort of summary—their ability to project voices that might otherwise not be heard.

Now the other side of the coin: the Bank suggests that perhaps the principal NGO weakness, where it exists, is the failure to effectively communicate with rural people on their own level of understanding. Other potentially negative characteristics they cite are their typically small size and a limited financial base that limits their capacity for large-scale endeavors; their limited managerial and organisational abilities, plus a tendency to focus only on their own priorities and outlooks rather than those of the people they seek to serve.

Some NGO limitations will probably persist until a larger, more experienced, and better financed NGO leadership cadre is developed. Certainly the movement's sophistication and breadth of vision is increasing as it grows and gains political power. USAID and some other economic assistance agencies are working to help NGOs overcome their weaknesses through training programs. But, in the final analysis, NGOs need to take responsibility for remedying their own weaknesses.

One more important thing that NGOs—national and international—might do to help to relieve rural poverty and promote rural development is help to recruit more

'local' NGOs that can help farm communities better organise themselves. This is a formidable task. The larger international and national networks—CARE, Save the Children, OXFAM, Aga Khan Foundation, among the international NGOs—might be willing to participate to some degree in the process of identifying new national NGO partners, even though they may not be willing to take on the whole job themselves. But they will want the help of others.

Could or would the World Bank or the bilateral donors effectively take on the major responsibilities for recruiting new NGOs to work at the local level? I've discussed this possibility with the Bank's top people who are charged by Jim Wolfensohn with implementing the Bank's new rural development strategy. They share my view about the need to find new ways to recruit more NGOs for this scaling up function but they point out that the Bank works only with governments and then on the basis of big loans, not grants. Asking the Bank to work at that level of detail is, they believe, just not realistic. And I fear that financially strapped bilateral donors are in the same boat.

I believe the developing world needs a new type of organisation operating at a level between the NGOs working in particular villages and, on the other hand, the national or regional governments. It should be an organisation capable of identifying farm community interests but sufficiently different to have a broad strategic outlook that the communities tend to lack. It would be separate from government and, as far as practicable, from government patronage, but close enough to give local politicians and bureaucrats a way to take at least partial credit for successful efforts. It would be close enough to the World Bank and other donors to allow them to provide strategic guidance, but sufficiently removed to avoid the complicated procurement and accounting procedures that until now discouraged NGO-development agency team work.

These new mid-level rural development groups could also advise on, encourage and protect community farming groups' interests. They could also be the channel for the small amounts of funds needed from donors or from foundations to help organise farm communities. Perhaps they could also help farmers participate in the regional and national economic and environmental planning that is becoming something of a prerequisite for securing developmental funding. Such an organisation should obviously have good connections with the international agricultural research centres.

I have no pat formula for what a mid-level organisation for various countries and cultures would look like. From country to country it would obviously have to differ enough to meet the needs of specific groups of farmers. But it should be similar enough to provide a basis for working across countries and regions. A period of experimentation is clearly called for to get rural development moving on a sustainable and more equitable basis in the years just ahead.

## **Concluding Thoughts**

I leave you with one more idea to ponder. A lot of my 20-year diplomatic career and my 20 years of working with NGOs has involved operating within the framework of organisations conceived during the post-World War II years of western-led organisational creativity and expansion—for instance the International Monetary

Fund, the World Bank, the United Nations and its specialised agencies, the OECD, and bi-lateral aid-giving organisations. But a lot has changed in these 40 or 50 years, and some of our earlier organisations now badly need reform.

Where will the impetus for a new period of organisational invention come from? Hopefully, in no small part from the NGO movement, particularly NGOs in the developing countries. After all, the most rapid economic growth is now coming from developing countries, particularly those in East Asia. I hope and believe that a new wave of organisational creativity will spring from the same circumstances that brought about this new economic dynamism—creativity that will not only embrace such problems as trade and industrialisation but also the problems of rural people and poverty. For more equitable and more productive rural societies *must* emerge—for the good of the farmers and for the good of the countries concerned. We have no time to lose.