Community development and land reform. Preliminary observations on some cases in Latin America*

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"Agrarian Reform emphasizes land. Community development emphasizes man. Neither can ignore the fundamental fact in rural life that man and land are inseparable. For either programme to ignore the other is to diminish the potential of its own effectiveness. Each can raise its own effectiveness as well as the effectiveness of the other by sharing a common effort."

PAUL S. TAYLOR

The need to link community development programmes with such larger development measures like agrarian reform, cooperatives and supervised credit has been stressed many times the last few years 1). It is well-known that community development programmes often do not have the success that would be desired to make its name true. Sometimes such failures are due to unresolved land tenure problems which, since they are fundamental to most peasants, hinder them from taking confidence in government action 2). "There are exceptions to this rule of course, but latifundismo (the large estate system) is almost everywhere recognised to be not only an economic problem, but also a hindrance to community development" 3). This effect of static, feudal societies on the minds of people is not only recognised by social anthropologists but also by agricultural technicians 4). The author of this paper found a confirmation of it, when he did village level work in the Valle de la Esperanza in El Salvador in 1955. Among other things he assisted in a sanitary drinking water project and road improvement. The Valle de la Esperanza is

*) This article only contains the personal opinion of the writer. It cannot be seen as an expression of any United Nations agency on the matter.


well known for the feudal social structure determining human relation there \(^5\), and for the damaging influence of this situation on community organization activities that were carried out in the region \(^6\).

Both the sanitation project and the road improvement corresponded with strongly felt needs of the villagers (who had to get water from contaminated wells some distance away, and who suffered also when the rainy season made the communication with the most nearby small town an unpleasant adventure). The projects were also ideal as regards the contribution from the government. For the sanitary drinking water system several kilometers of pipes were being supplied by the government and also technical supervision and help in capturing the water from a clear well in the nearby mountains. The villagers only had to contribute manual labour, which, because of chronic underemployment in rural El Salvador, was abundantly available. Some similar deal was offered for the road-work.

Only after living among them for several months \(^7\), and once their confidence had been gained, some of the factors, that impeded the people from wholehearted participation, could be discovered.

The most striking factor certainly was distrust. Once a confidential relationship with villagers had been established they revealed their strong conviction that the sanitation project would not be to their benefit, but work out to be for the local large landholder, whose house was not far from the centre of the village. Government employees and landlords always organize such things together, they had experienced. The people also resented to be asked to work without being paid by the officials who themselves earn (compared with a rural day-labourer) relatively high salaries. Most of them, besides that, enjoy also incomes as absentee landlords. Corresponding with this last situation is the fact, which could easily be observed, that those government agents (mostly engineers, but also a social educator, an ex-army major) treated the villagers not as responsible citizens whose collaboration was sought with reasonable arguments, but as inferior beings, who are just being told what they should do, like it is the custom in a feudal society. This also was strongly resented, but since no open opposition was tolerated people withdrew in silence and just did not show up when it came to the point of working.

This attitude of distrust and resentment was expressly related with such past experiences as the bloody repression of a peasant revolt in 1932, which was still well remembered in 1955, although little talked about and then only in a low voice at home \(^8\).


\(^6\) Carlos Campos Jiménez, *Una Experiencia de Organización de la Comunidad en el Valle de la Esperanza, Serie sobre Organización de la Comunidad, No. 6*, included as No. 20 in the *Colección de Estudios*, published by UNESCO and OAS, 1954.


\(^8\) Alejandro Dagoberto Marroquín indicates that in Panchimalco, the village in El Salvador he studied, in 1958, the same fear for authorities exists, related to these events. Alejandro D. Marroquín, *Panchimalco. Investigación Sociológica*, Editorial Universitaria, San Salvador, 1959, p. 324 and 346 ff.
It has been told to me that thousands of persons had been killed those days and that since then public gatherings of more than five peasants were not allowed. It is also known that the formation of peasants' organizations in El Salvador was legally forbidden.

It will be clear that in this kind of "social climate" creating an atmosphere favorable to voluntary cooperation is very difficult. "When a village is differentiated in this way by divergence of economic interest, the general body of villagers may not be motivated to give free labour for the benefit of the privileged minority" certainly applies also for the described case, which can be seen as quite representative for many Latin American villages.

Distrust and suspicion was also one of the first things encountered by agricultural extension students in the region of Turrialba in Costa Rica when they were sent into the villages to study the effectiveness of extension agencies there. The directors of the study note the importance of the attitude of the extension worker to overcome such distrust, but they did not indicate much about the reasons for such distrust and the relation of this and the "stratification on a class-system" which they found (by means of sociometric techniques) to exist in some of the villages. In this respect the great advantages may be stressed of "participant observation" and "participant intervention" as research techniques in order to discover deeper motivations.

Some rather few and restricted experiments in which certain measures to improve the "social climate" were the condition for cooperative effort and community development may be worthwhile to notice.

In El Salvador the author became acquainted with one of the "Fincas de Beneficio Proporcional" of the Institute de Colonización Rural. These are resettlement projects of landless peasants on land belonging to the government: a kind of collective farm, managed initially by employees of the Institute, but destined to be taken over eventually by the peasants themselves. Successful community development efforts have

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9) According to Sergio Maturana, "Los Problemas de Tenencia de la Tierra en los Paises de centrosamérica". FAO/CAIS/63, 1963, p. 51, 17000 peasants were killed in this repression. The terror still existing in rural areas could often be verified when quiet leisurely gatherings of people in the centre of the village suddenly broke up when some boy came running up announcing a patrol of the national guards approaching the village. See also Marroquín, op., cit., p. 324.


11) See Kurt Lewin, Resolving Social Conflicts, part II, ch. 5, Experiments in Social Space; and part II, ch. 7 Times perspective and morale, as regards the great difficulties in overcoming low morale.


13) For such distrust in a Mexican village see e.g. Oscar Lewis, Life in a Mexican Village. Tepoztlan restudied. University of Illinois Press, 1951, p. 292.


15) id., ibid., p. 48 ff. As regards the land tenure situation in Costa Rica: this has been characterized as follows: "Aun cuando Costa Rica es a veces mencionada como nación de pequeños agricultores, et 9% de las fincas abarcan et 71% de las tierras cultivadas", in Earl Jones, Revisión de Algunas Reformas Agrarias, Instituto Interamericano de Ciencias Agrícolas, Turrialba, Costa Rica, 1962, p. 13.

been carried out in this new small village\textsuperscript{17}). It is a pity, however, that this experiment was so limited and that any enlargement would probably find resistance among the large landowners class of El Salvador as has been said\textsuperscript{18}). A more careful evaluation of this type of project in El Salvador may be well recommended.

Another rather small scale but scientifically well controlled experiment in this respect has been carried out in the ex-hacienda Vicos in Peru, under the direction of social anthropologists and other technicians from Cornell University\textsuperscript{19}). A rather typical Peruvian hacienda, Vicos, was taken over by the study-group in 1952, with about 300 Quechua speaking Indian families, attached to the land (but owning none of it). At that time “standards of living were at a bare minimum. Health and nutritional levels were extremely low. Educational facilities were almost completely lacking. Cooperation within the community was the exception rather than the rule, and resistance to the outside world was high. Attitudes towards life were static and pessimistic” (op., cit., p. 80—81). The purpose of the experiment was “developing within the community independent and dynamic problem-solving and decision-making organizations which could gradually assume the responsibilities of leadership in public affairs in a rational and humane manner and along democratic lines” (op., cit., p. 83). Many of the traditional abuses of the hacienda system abolished and a new type of relationship, based on the principles of friendship and respect for human dignity, were being created\textsuperscript{20}). The inhabitants were also being helped with an attractive credit system to improve their agriculture.

Between 1952 and 1957 care was taken to transfer little by little the executive power over the hacienda to the indigenous community. Locally respected people were carefully selected and trained in bearing responsibility and settling conflicts. Decisions made by this group were being discussed by the community as a whole. At the same time improvements in health and education were being introduced and the local people made responsible for such activities. The several groups organized to this effect gradually learned to assume greater responsibilities so that in 1957 the management of the whole hacienda could practically be given over to an elected body of local leaders. This case can be considered as an example of a slowly executed agrarian reform. The results were striking. Production of potatoes went suddenly up a 100% from 1957 (when everything was still managed under the old system) till 1958, with only a third of the labour force working on it. Production per man thus went up 600%\textsuperscript{21}).


\textsuperscript{18}) Fritz Loenholdt, op., cit., p. 57. It is interesting to notice that Manurana, op. cit., p. 51, sees a relationship between the creation of this Institute and the peasant revolt that took place in 1932.


\textsuperscript{20}) Mario Vázquez, op., cit., p. 301.

\textsuperscript{21}) Allan Holmberg, \textit{Land Tenure and Planned Social Change: A cases from Vicos, Peru}, HUMAN ORGANIZATION, 1959, 1, p. 9.
Holmberg concludes then (in this article): “While it is dangerous to draw general conclusions from a single instance of this kind, particularly one in which many intervening variables were obviously involved, nevertheless, the data from Vicos are not without theoretical significance. They tend to confirm a hypothesis long ago expressed by Marx, namely that the alienation of people from control over the means of production retards social and economic development”.

So, “at least one community of the sierra has thus taken a new lease on life” 22), but it seems that the surrounding haciendas are now having difficulties with their indigenous inhabitants to whom the Cornell experiment seems to have a strong appeal, and who seem to loose their traditional apathy 23).

The anthropologist Alain Dessaint, when describing extensively the often socially dis-organizing effects of the feudal hacienda and the plantation system on the indigenous population of Guatemala, also notes an awakening influence, somewhat similar to that evoked in Vicos, Peru, but on a larger scale, of agrarian reform and other organizing efforts carried out in the early fifties in Guatemala 24). “The period of reform, 1945—1954, caused a change in the paternalistic relationship of owner towards worker, as the latter especially began to identify himself with nation-wide groups and movements” 25).

Also Richard Adams observed the influence of these 1952—53 land redistribution measures, (which were suspended in 1954)26. “Among its effects, the Arbenz period destroyed any remnant of mutual interest between farm laborers and farm owners. The paternalism of the earlier pattern persists today mainly in the written provisions of the labor code. The farm labor groups are now acutely aware that a new type of relationships is possible between themselves and the cosmopolite, local upper and middle classes. Similarly, the emergent middle mass is conscious of its own potential strength, once it has been consolidated through labor unions and similar organizations. It was the emergent middle that generally gave dynamic impetus to the Arbenz programmes” 27).

As has been indicated, although, in the 1963 Report on the World Social Situation, when nothing the “explosive unrest in large parts of the countryside” in relation with the increasing strength of these forces: “Such movements have not yet been objectively studied” 28).

As regards the influence of peasant organizations and land reform measures on the morale of people, much can certainly be learnt in Mexico, where such programmes

22) Allan Holmberg in Social Change in Latin America Today, op., cit., p. 95.
23) See e.g. Mario C. Vázquez, op., cit., p. 307.
25) id., ibid., p. 335. See also Alain Dessaint, Papel que juegan la Hacienda y la Plantación en el Cambio Socio-cultural: Guatemala y Brasil, in GUATEMALA INDIGENA, Vol. II, No. 2, p. 33.
have been carried out with ups and downs since the beginning of this century. In the literature on community development in Mexico 29), however, generally little attention has been given to this aspect.

Until now also relatively little attention seems to have been paid to the relation of community development and land reform in the Centro Regional de Educación Fundamental para el Desarrollo de la Comunidad en América Latina (CREFAL) in Pátzcuaro, Mich., México, according to the BOLETIN INFORMATIVO and the INFORME DE ACTIVIDADES published the last few years by this institute.

One of the few more extensively studied experiments in Mexico of a combination of land reform, peasant organization, supervised credit and community development is the one, carried out mostly since 1936, in the Comarca Lagunera, a cottonproducing region in the north of Mexico 30), which the author of this paper visited recently.

From before the Mexican revolution of 1917 this region has been in turmoil: the peasants, mostly workers attached to the cotton-haciendas, becoming organized in order to struggle for better conditions, strikes, and strike-breaking efforts by the large landholders. In 1936 these actions took such dramatic proportions that the national economy of the country was being threatened. This made President Lázaro Cárdenas promise the peasants’ organizations to apply the Art. 27 of the Mexican Constitution (concerning land reform) to the region, which meant redistribution of most of the haciendas among peasant communities. “It was not until the land-workers of La Laguna organized and acted for themselves that they were able to secure application of national laws to the region” 31).

In order not to damage the existing production systems too much, the haciendas were converted into a number of collectively worked ejidos 32), and a number of legally al-

29) See e.g. Report of the United Nations Study Tour on Community Development to Mexico, Costa Rica, Jamaica and Puerto Rico, United Nations Series on Community Development (ST/SOA/SER. 0/30), 1958, and Experimentos en Formación Profesional para el Desarrollo de la Comunidad en los países de América Latina, Naciones Unidas (ST/SOA/Ser. 0/29), 1957. Problems related to land reform are extensively discussed, however, in Ricardo Pozas Arciniega, El Desarrollo de la Comunidad, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1961, and also to some degree in Desarrollo de la Comunidad Local de Nayarit (México), Naciones Unidas, 1954, (ST/SOA/Ser. 0/18).


31) Clarence Senior, op., cit., p. 66.

32) Ejido — there is no satisfactory English equivalent of this term; the word has come to mean "the land granted under the reform and also by association the community which receives the grant". See Land Reform, Defects in Agrarian Structure as Obstacles to Economic Development, United Nations, 1951, (E/2003/Rev. 1) p. 59.

33) So e.g. the Tlahualillo hacienda (existing of 46 630 HA, half of which cultivated; see Juan Ballesteros Porta, op., cit., p. 66) was divided into 13 ejidos and around 150 "small properties". See Senior, op., cit., p. 93.
The collective ejidos were run by the peasants and their leaders in collaboration with government technicians, especially those from the Ejido Credit Bank. In 45 days three fourth of the irrigated land and one fourth of the unirrigated but usable land in the region was turned over to 30,000 peasants organized into about 300 ejidos.

During the first four years after the reform, while Cárdenas was President, great efforts were made to “secure the participation of the ejidatarios themselves in all aspects of the new social structures in the region.” The organization department of the Ejido Bank, in consultation with the more responsible peasant leaders, began to organize advisory committees of ejidatarios. Later this set-up became more formalized and conventions were held in each zone of the region to elect members. Also a Central Committee was formed with zone delegates, each of whom was responsible for a certain field in the communities of his zone. Such fields were: education (help to build schools, help to organize night-schools, encourage sports, get community support for school gardens, etc.), agriculture (stimulate, in collaboration with agronomists, all kinds of improvements), health (promote public health activities in the communities, street cleaning, etc.). It is interesting to note the participation of women, strongly stimulated by President Cárdenas, in all kinds of activities. So “the most outstanding cooperative successes in the region have been registered by 61 women’s groups, running corn-grinding machines.”

Although the word community development was never used, the programme executed in the Laguna region may well be considered to fall under the later internationally accepted definition.

The whole programme was given legal personality in 1939 under the name Central Union of Collective Credit Societies. “The first flush of enthusiasm among the peasants gave a tremendous advantage to the Central Union. It seemed obvious to everyone that “one for all and all for one” was a slogan that would bring results.” But later gradually the high morale of the early days declined. Personality difficulties, consequences of mistakes made during the redistribution of land, defalcations of several minor officials, decreasing support from the national government during the presidential terms following Cárdenas, changes in policy of the Ejido Bank (more stress on purely economic gains), several years of drought that exhausted the irrigation scheme,
rivalry among peasant groups, increasing population pressure and many other factors are considered responsible for this decline, in the several studies quoted. Careful evaluation of the influence of each of these factors should be undertaken, but goes far beyond the limits of this paper. An indicator that has been used sometimes is productivity or "expanded output". While, as we have seen, in Vicos, Peru, productivity per HA went up significantly after the reforms, the cotton yield per HA in the Laguna region showed strong fluctuations (probably depending on the irrigation water available) both before and after the changes of 1936, but the productivity of wheat per HA showed a decline after the first four years of the reform has passed.

It has also been noted that while productivity in the ejidal sector of the Laguna region has fallen, it went up in the private sector. Senior demonstrates, however, that the decisive factor for this is not a constant (the ejidal form of agricultural organization) but a great number of variables. There are also exceptions: So in some ejidos, like Tlahualilo, production after the reform went steadily up to more than double the hacienda productivity.

Whetten sees as the two main reasons for the lack of success of most collective ejidos 1. the lack of adequate local leadership and 2. lack of discipline. He also notes a tendency towards assignation of individual parcels to ejidatarios as a possible solution. For the individually worked ejidos of the Bajio region, however, Castillo indicates 1. structural and 2. functional problems in the ejidal organization which have much in common with the reasons for the failure of many collective ejidos in the Comarca Lagunera. He stresses the need for administrative efficiency, the need to create instruments of collective action that help the community to solve all kinds of problems and integrate themselves into the national political system, thus improving some of the aspects of the ejido which do not conform with modern criteria of efficiency.

He indicates as a "structural problem": the centralized decision making by the agencies in the regions where land reform has been carried out, which creates a material and psychological climate in which both the individual ejidatario and the community are

40) Senior, op. cit., Table 5, p. 71 and table 7, p. 79. He also notes, however, the "more equal distribution of profits among resident workers", which benefits the Mexican economy, while "formely few invididuals spent all the profits in the capitals of European countries or elsewhere" (op. cit., p. 238). The importance of such changes for national economic development has been stressed by Aaul Prebisch, Towards a dynamic development policy for Latin America.
41) Senior, op. cit., p. 189. In the Bajio region, where land reform did not promote collective ejidos, like in the Laguna region, but ejidos that were parcelled out individually among ejidatarios, a similar fact, private farmers doing better than ejidatarios, has been noted by Carlos Manuel Castillo, La Economia Agrícpla en la Region del Bajio, in PROBLEMAS AGRÍCOLAS E INDUSTRIALES DE MEXICO, No. 3-4, Vol. VIII, 1956, especially ch. IX. Castillo also indicates many other fields, e.g. education, (op. cit., p. 63 ff) in which the ejidatarios are in adisadvantage, as compared with the private farmers.
42) Senior, op. cit., p. 193.
43) Juan Ballesteros Porta, op. cit., p. 73.
45) Carlos M. Castillo, op. cit., p. 156.
46) id., ibid., p. 159. Interesting demonstrations of such phenomina can be found in the Saturday page of the Mexican newspaper "El Día", dedicated to agricultural problems and farmers' complaints.
not capable of acting for themselves even in relatively simple situations\(^{46}\)). The paternalistic attitude of the central organizations hinders the social evolution of the ejidos\(^{47}\).

These facts are related to the "functional problems", especially: the need to stimulate training of local leaders to organize group action and the need to spread in a more balanced way the responsibilities within the ejidos\(^{48}\).

This is the same for the Laguna region. Senior indicates that notwithstanding the increased "well-being"\(^{49}\) notable among the peasants, especially after the initial years "the education of the ejidatarios themselves in a manner to involve in a "problem-solving" has been neglected in a most irresponsible manner"\(^{50}\).

On several other occasions the paternalism of government employees and its disastrous effects on people's self-help activity has been noted for the Laguna region\(^{51}\). One of the explanations given by Whetten is that because of lack of good personnel the Ejido Bank recruited many of the former employees of the old haciendas\(^{52}\). A problem related to this paternalism is the fact that some of the leaders arising from among the peasants start dominating and even exploiting them, once they are in a power position, a rather wide-spread but little studied phenomenon of rural life in Mexico, called "caciquisme"\(^{53}\).

Carlos Castillo characterizes such problems and the needed processes of development as "eminentemente politico por su misma naturaleza"\(^{54}\), but they certainly are (or should be) also the main focus of community development, as has been said: "The goal is to achieve the pre-conditions to economic growth — the mental climate, knowledge and skills and the organization and facilities needed if economic impact is to be both significant and sustained"\(^{55}\), and: "while motivation adds the dimension for popular enthusiasm to getting needed things done, the quality and the impact of popular effort must be safeguarded through good organization"\(^{56}\).

The cases where traditional distrust has been changed to such popular enthusiasm,

\(^{46}\) id., ibid., p. 160.

\(^{47}\) Castillo, op., cit., p. 162.

\(^{48}\) Although the United Nations Second Report "Progress in Land Reform" (E/2930), 1956, p. 135, indicates about the reforms in the Laguna district: "the effect of these measures on the well-being of the rural population is not measurable", an attempt to evaluate this aspect with modern techniques of the social sciences may now be worthwhile. Clarence Senior, who participated many years in several projects carried out in the region, says about "well-being": "It is towards this goal value that the Laguna experiment has made the most progress. Much of the advance is now past quantifying. One thinks for example of numerous reports of eyewitnesses and participants in whippings of field workers only a few months before the expropriations; of houses destroyed and persons driven of haciendas only a few years before 1936. One remembers hundreds of meetings in which men and women vibrated with a new dignity and determination to work hard and make a success of the "land is now ours", op., cit., p. 195.

\(^{50}\) Castillo, op., cit., p. 198.

\(^{51}\) See e.g. also Isabel Kelly, *Informe preliminar del proyecto de habitacion en La Laguna, Ejido El Cuje, cercano a Torreon, Coahuila, Instituto de Asuntos Interamericanos, México, 1953*, (mimeogr.), p. 6, as regards self-help housing.

\(^{52}\) Whetten, op., cit., p. 225.


\(^{54}\) Castillo, op., cit., p. 160.

\(^{55}\) id., par. 73.

\(^{56}\) id., par. 83.
as land reform measures seem to be able to provoke, may be strongly recommended for scientific evaluation, especially as regards these lasting effects. The worthwhile experiments which have been carried out in several regions of Mexico or in other Latin American countries with large scale land reform programs like Bolivia, Cuba and to a certain degree Venezuela, can thus serve as regards both successes and mistakes, the planning of similar measures, barely needed, or in the course of being undertaken, in many other countries 57).

Landhervorming in een Westsiciliaans Latifondo-dorp
de bestendiging van een feodale structuur 1)

A. Blok

In het begin van de jaren vijftig introduceerde de siciliaanse regering een landhervorming in ruim dertig dorpen. Voor de uitvoering hiervan werd een speciale organisatie opgericht, en Ente per la Riforma Agraria in Sicilia (E.R.A.S.) 2). In 1961 bestudeerde ik deze landhervorming in het westsiciliaanse dorp San Genuardo 3). Het bleek mij dat hier het resultaat gering was. Het doel van dit artikel is na te gaan welke factoren verantwoordelijk zijn voor dit geringe effect. Voor deze evaluatie is nodig dat de gegevens van 1948 omtrent landbezit en sociale stratificatie vergeleken worden met die van 1961 4).

Als theoretisch geraamte zal ik het begrip 'feodaliteit' gebruiken zoals dat gedefinieerd is door de amerikaanse socioloog Sjöberg, die een waardevolle bijdrage heeft geleverd naar het verschijnsel feodaliteit 5). Sjöberg definieert feodaliteit in...

57) The case studies of the relationships between community development and agrarian reform in Venezuela and Ecuador by Paul S. Taylor may be available on request at United Nations, New York, according to Progress in Land Reform, Third Report, op., cit., preface, note 3.


2) Sinds 1947 heeft het eiland Sicilië regionale autonomie. Hoewel de landhervorming onder toezicht staat van het departement van landbouw en bosbouw van de siciliaanse regering, is men financieel in hoge mate afhankelijk van Rome. Een groot deel van de geldelijke middelen, nodig voor de ontwikkeling van Zuid-Italië, wordt gefourni erd door een speciaal voor dat doel geëreerd fonds, la cassa per il mezzogiorno.

3) Een pseudoniem voor een „agro-town“ in het zuidwestelijk deel van de provincie Palermo.

4) Informatie werd voornamelijk verkregen via informele gesprekken met de bewoners van het dorp, waar ik gedurende vijf maanden woonde. De op deze wijze verkregen gegevens konden slechts zeer ten dele worden aangevuld met officieel statistisch materiaal.