

Book Review

Anirudh Krishna, Norman Uphoff and Milton J. Esman (Eds). *Reasons for Hope: Instructive Experiences in Rural Development*. Sage Publications. New Delhi. 1998. vii + 322pp. Indian rupees 250 (Pb).

The development of rural areas is now becoming one of the major objectives of government policy in less developed countries. It has become part of policy simply because governments in developing countries are beginning to realise that to tackle poverty effectively, and to reduce the pressure on urban centres, income levels, as well as the quality of life in rural areas has to be made significantly attractive to prevent people from migrating to the relatively higher income urban areas. Rapid urbanisation in many developing countries has resulted in increased social stress which is reflected in high crime rates, and a substantial decline in social services such as education and health, water supply and sanitation, electricity and housing, etc. The developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America are afflicted with both problems - rural poverty/environmental degradation and a rapidly urbanising sector that is estimated to double every twelve to fifteen years.

Western perspectives on the third world, that is the developing countries, can be categorised into two broad schools of thought - one optimistic that they can achieve a developed status through economic liberalisation and export promotion. The other being pessimistic that if this is not achievable the developing world would collapse under the adverse impact of growing populations, environmental degradation, ultimately leading to civil disorder. These are two extreme views which the editors of this volume say do not reflect reality, as they are simplistic. They support their view point by citing eighteen case studies on rural development. These eighteen case studies reflect the world's most successful rural development success stories. Region-wise there are seven case studies from South Asia, three from South East Asia and four each from Africa and Latin America. The case studies have different emphases, some deal with multisectoral development; others are limited to agriculture based development; a number deal with health, nutrition, family planning and water supply criteria whereas the fourth category discusses issues in agroforestry, watershed and wildlife management. To sum up, therefore, all these examples deal with different aspects of life in the rural areas. Of particular interest to South Asian students of development studies are the detailed presentations about the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, the Orangi Pilot Project in Karachi, Pakistan, the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) and the Savings and Credit Cooperative Movement (SANASA) in Sri Lanka.

Having perused these case studies, one concludes that there is a reasonable chance that the developing countries would be able to overcome their many problems. The thrusts for development are very evident and with the right amount of enlightened political will, combined with consistent and supportive economic policy, developing countries can forge ahead. However, a word of caution is necessary. This volume deals with only eighteen case studies - may be these are the better known ones. One does not know how many unsuccessful instances there have been - supposedly that would fill several volumes. Again, successful case studies are only that - case studies. For wider adoption other issues come into play and case studies that are successful in one part of a country may not be suitable in another part. It is important, therefore, to identify the factors that make for successful development projects. Blind replication of case studies, no matter how successful, can give rise to problems if local, regional and national conditions are ignored by being not properly factored in.

To conclude, this volume has been well edited and is a pleasure to read. It is easily accessible to the general reader and that is what all good academic work should address. The information presented in this volume can serve as benchmarks for future research in similar and related fields.

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