

THE VERBAL CULTURE AND THE PROBLEMS OF AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE PHILIPPINES¹

JUAN F. JAMIAS²
University of the Philippines

Specially after the end of the Second World War, program of precipitated social change became widespread. In the Philippines, these programs have proliferated notably in the area of economic development. More attempts of this nature are apparently forthcoming particularly in the so-called under-developed or developing countries. The impetus increases as development becomes more and more regarded also as tactics of war.

In a technical research report, McKendry and associates (1967) described the relevance of economic or community development to military strategy and tactics. They noted the drastically changed role of the military as expressed by knowledgeable authorities in the United States. One was the Secretary of Defense who had stated that "the concept that military hardware is the exclusive or even the primary ingredient of permanent peace in the mid-twentieth century is absurd" (McKendry, McKendry & Guthrie, 1967).

Commenting on the role of the United States in this new strategy, McKendry and associates asserted:

¹ Paper delivered at the Psychological Association of the Philippines Convention, Manila, January, 1967.

² The author is public information officer and assistant professor, Department of Agricultural Information and Communications, College of Agriculture University of the Philippines.

From the military standpoint, a quite adequate goal for economic development assistance is to insure that a nation progresses to a point where it cannot easily be brought into a sphere of influence which has or is likely to have aggressive designs on our national security. As a consequence, support is given in many cases to insure independence, nationalism, and neutralism in the country being supported, a policy which is difficult to comprehend and easy to misperceive. (McKendry, et. al., 1967)

Such beliefs spring from the faith, also held by students of social science, that (a) purposive change can be caused, or more specifically, accelerated and (b) that the strategies for such change are now not only available but also work.

Yet, recent scholarship on one such commonly acknowledged factor of development, namely, education, reveals some disproving cases. Data on 75 countries compiled by Harbison and Myers (1963) empirically supported the idea that the educational development of a country positively correlated with its economic development. But this positive relationship failed in the case of a few countries including India, Egypt, and the Philippines which ranked high in education but were relatively low in gross national product (GNP) per capita.

Vitaliano Bernardino (1966) reported the findings on the Philippines:

From a personal interview with Dr. Harbison. [I discovered that] the Philippines was an exception to the generalization established in the study because while the Philippines would rank high on the basis of indicators of human resource development, it would rank

very low in level of economic development, as measured by the gross national product per capita.

Although the Philippines' ratios of human resource development ranked among either the advanced or semi-advanced countries, the Philippine GNP per capita of about ₱300.00 classified it as economically underdeveloped.

The possible reasons for the wayward correlation are many. Admittedly, education is not the only factor of development. Other factors that may affect a country's economic progress include natural resources, foreign markets, the quality of education itself, and others. One engaging area of speculation is the social psychological characteristics of a society. For parsimony of approach, one interested in following up this theoretic orientation may consider just one area of development in one country. Striking relevancies are observed in the case of agricultural development in the Philippines.

In the Philippines, today, as in many modernized or modernizing countries, the age-old function of direct field tillage co-exists with a system of activities that increases and accelerates farm productivity. This system proceeds from the organization, discovery, and transmission of technology. It is most clearly seen in the context of a land-grant system agricultural college which does the three functions of institution, research, and extension. Any or all of these activities may be done as well by separate agencies, public or private. Such agencies may be a research institute, a community development organization, an agricultural extension bureau, a commercial concern, and the like.

This system is isolable from direct farm operation and may be considered as the second level factor of production.

In this second level, the concern is not the manipulation of the objects of production but rather the symbolic components of the agricultural enterprise. For this reason, this other level is presently called the "verbal culture" to distinguish it from the basic function of production such as sowing and tending plants in the case of agriculture and the casting of nets in fishing. In the production of man's needs derived from agriculture, the verbal culture is essential but, obviously, not absolutely necessary. The impact of the verbal culture, however, distinguishes the social system with a traditional state of agriculture from that with a modern one. For in a larger sense, the components of the verbal culture namely, education, research, and extension, become the tactical processes of innovation and change which are needed for progress.

The effectiveness of the verbal culture in increasing agricultural productivity has been shown in the experience of other countries. One evidence indicates that in the United States (from 1910 to 1914 and from 1945 to 1949), only 17% of the additional agricultural output was accounted for by increased inputs of capital and labor (Schultz, 1961) remaining 87% was attributed to the "residual factor." The most important components of this residual factor included education, research, training, economies of scale, and other factors affecting human productivity. In Argentina, the equivalent percentage attributed to the residual factor (at the periods studied) was 62. In Brazil, it was 45%, and in Mexico, 50%.

On the basis of these data, Mehta (1965) an Indian manpower planning specialist, stated:

There is a growing volume of empirical evidence to show that investments in agricultural education, training, and research have made very substantial contribution to the

spectacular increases in agricultural output recorded in recent years, and that rapid rate of "human capital formation" is as important as a pre-condition of rapid rate of "physical capital formation." The countries of the Asian region are, therefore, becoming increasingly conscious of the need for the urgency of agricultural manpower planning as an integral part of general economic development planning.

The impact of the verbal culture in the agricultural development of this country, if any, is not yet of any appreciable magnitude. Philippine agriculture is still traditional in the overall. And the increased productivity resulting from modernized or developed agriculture is still to be seen.

Imports of agricultural products have been increasing instead. The Philippines imported P66.4 million worth of cereals in 1964 compared with \$94.8 million in 1965. Dairy products cost the country \$23.4 million in 1964 and \$26 million the next year. (Central Bank of the Philippines, 1965). These, of course, have not been our only agricultural imports.

The case of rice production dramatically illustrates the failure of the verbal culture in increasing agricultural productivity in the Philippines. The agricultural economists Ruttan and Venegas (1966) found that the yield increases in the country during the decade from 1954 to 1964 were accounted for almost entirely by increases in area planted. Of the added harvest 83% was due to increases in area planted and only 17% was due to yield increases. Yet during the period studied, innovations such as new varieties, better cultural practices including use of fertilizer and insecticides, were already available in the country at least in the experiment station farms and other centers of the verbal culture.

On the other hand, it would be hard to accept that the Philippines' established verbal system is still under-

developed. Agricultural education in the Philippines is considered by many as among the most advanced, if not the most advanced, in Southeast Asia (Bernardino, 1966). There are now 91 agriculture students and 39 public and private colleges dotting the country's many islands. The goals of research and extension are being pursued by a plethora of government and private agencies. The Agricultural Productivity Commission (APC) which has for its main function "accelerating progressive improvement in the productivity of the farms and the advancement of farmers" counts a complement of 4,586 extension officers including 2,858 agricultural extension officers, 975 home extension officers, 800 rural club officers, 151 fiber extension agents, and 102 farm cooperative officers. (Commission of Agricultural Productivity, 1964-65). And the APC is but one of the extension type agencies in the Philippines.

In sum, the expected impact of a developed verbal culture on agricultural development is not evidenced in the Philippine case. Here we have a narrower if more compact analogy of the Harbison and Myers (1964) finding on the Philippines which showed a discrepancy in the expected relationship between manpower development and economic development. The dynamics of the two situations, namely, Harbison and Myers' (1964) and the present agricultural case should be the same. And a study of variables in the agricultural setting should offer a more specific and deeper access to the dynamics of the Harbison and Myers' (1964) data.

On the basis of impression gathered in one's close professional connection with the verbal culture for a decade, some speculations on a possible explanatory approach to the exception are hazarded. It is emphasized that these are impres-

sionistic statements, not assertions of proof. The orientation is socio-psychological as they focus on the response of individuals interacting with influencing group norms.

The verbal culture historically is an innovation adopted into the local social system from a foreign source, i.e., the United States. Its basic roots spring from the land grant college and agricultural development tie-up to which many would attribute the agricultural progress achieved in that country.

It seems that on transplantation of the innovation to the host country, the forms rather than the substance of the system were conserved. The substance underwent a process of fitting to the value patterns of Filipinos so that in practice the system became more and more the reflection of Filipino motivations and needs.

A good example of this process of Filipinization is the "white-collarization" of the agriculture degree. Data on the employment distribution of graduates of the University of the Philippines College of Agriculture show that but for 8% engaged in farming the rest may be classified as white collar workers. (Jasmin & Gagni, 1957). A later and more comprehensive survey revealed only 1.3% engaged in private farming or business (Montecillo & Mariano, 1962). Majority of the graduates are in teaching and extension work which are the goals likewise of graduates of other agricultural colleges. The chairman of the Department of Agricultural Education of the U.P. College of Agriculture has admitted to the author his inability to point to the schools from which may be expected graduates who will really go to farming. Even the vocational agriculture high schools which are most oriented to the preparation of farmers have turned out to be "take-off" schools

for college education and, ultimately, white collar occupation.

Another example of the local alteration imparted to the verbal culture is the setting up of "folk bureaucracies" rather than instrumental bureaucracies in agencies intended to service agriculture. The folk bureaucracies are what turn out after government offices or bureaus get their functional goals refurbished by the more personal needs of the "folk" in the office. Many development agencies have been established during the past two decades. The first activity done is the setting up of elaborate organizational structures comprised of desk jobs. These jobs, significantly, find justification in the verbal activities of training, research, or "change agenting." The fact that salaries take most of an agency's budget does not deter the continuance of operations and even of the hiring of more personnel if still possible.

The two examples indicate similar grains. Both illustrate the cannibalization of an introduced cultural system that, as a result, can no longer function as originally expected. If it does not function the way its original promoters envisioned it to be, there can only be poetic justice. For under any circumstance, any change in a country must be for considerations of itself, not of others. But this now treads the ground of ethics. And ethics does not belong here.

REFERENCES

- BERNARDINO, V. *Planning education for national development*. Philippines: Director of Public Schools, 1966.
- CENTRAL BANK OF THE PHILIPPINES. *1965 Annual Report*. Manila: CBP, 1965.
- COMMISSION ON AGRICULTURE PRODUCTIVITY. *13th Annual Report*. Diliman, Quezon City: CAP, 1964-65.
- HARBISON, G. Education and economic development. *Scientific American*, 1963, 209, 140-147.
- HARBISON, F. & MYERS, C. A. Education, manpower and economic growth. *Strategies*

- of human resource development*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964.
- JASMIN, M. V. & GAGNI, A. O. Occupation of recent graduates of the U.P. College of Agriculture (1950-1957). *University of the Philippines College of Agriculture Monograph Report*.
- MCKENDRY, J. M., MCKENDRY, M. S. & Guthrie, G. M. *The impact of social change in developing countries*. State College, Pennsylvania: HR 13-Singer, Inc., 1967.
- MEHTA, M. M. *Agricultural manpower planning as an integral part of national development, including methodological aspects*. Bangkok: Regional Seminars on Higher and Intermediate-Level Agricultural Education for Asia and the Far East, October, 1965.
- MONTECILLO, C. M. & MARIANO, S. W. *Employment statistics of U.P. College of Agricultural graduates 1911-1962*.
- RUTTAN, V. W., SOOTHIPUN, A. & VENEGAS, E. C. Changes in rice-growing in the Philippines and Thailand. *World Crops*, 1966 (March, reprint) 1-6.
- SCHULTZ, T. W. Economic prospects of primary products. In H. S. Ellis (Ed.), *Economic development for Latin America*. London: MacMillan, 1961, pp. 308-331.