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The AECD on Rural and Agricultural Development

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The AECD on Rural and Agricultural Development

ERNESTO GARILAO

THE workshop report was very brief, and as a matter of fact the bulk of it was on the recommendations made by the workshop. The Conference workshop, composed of delegates from all the participating Asian countries with the exception of Laos and Cambodia, discussed rural and agricultural development. Each participating delegation presented the situation report on the rural and agricultural development in their respective countries. These reports were then discussed and ultimately served as the background and framework, the final statement which the plenary session passed with minimal amendments.

The workshop did not discuss the technical aspects of agricultural productivity. Rather it concentrated its efforts on laying down the framework and basis for an ecumenical participation in rural and agricultural development, and at the same time identifying the priorities toward Church participation in developmental activities. The workshop recognized that the rural sector is still the most important sector in Asian society, primarily because most of the Asian countries are agricultural, and agriculture will, for some time to come, be the basis of their development. However, it emphasized that the agricultural sector is generally the most depressed sector due to land systems which have remained to a certain extent feudal. In most of the Asian countries, the majority of peasants are

deprived of incentives as well as the means to improve their farming methods and increase their income.

In considering the role of the Churches in rural and agricultural development, the workshop pointed out that the role is to be derived from a triple consideration. *First* (and this was most important), that the Churches recognize the inalienable function to uphold, like the prophets of old, the moral conscience of mankind, and as such, to place the development of peoples and nations as well as the implied and ensuing conflicts in an ethical context rather on mere economic gain or sheer play of power. *Second*, that as an organizational structure, the Churches should act as a force of union by widening the scope of ecumenical joint action and planning for development. *Third*, that the Churches should not underestimate their unique resources, both personal and organizational, for innovation and initiative.

The workshop gave light recommendations, all of which were passed by the plenary session. Amendments were minimal. The recommendations will be discussed here at length especially in relation to its implications in the Philippines. The first part is the Christian Church and land reform. The first recommendation of the workshop was on land reform.

No single recommendation from any workshop evoked as much discussion as this recommendation on land reform. The recommendation passed was in a sense a compromise, for there was a group in the Conference that advocated the complete withdrawal of the Churches from their agricultural landholdings in favor of their respective tenants. The consensus, however, was this: the diverse conditions in different countries make it impossible for the Conference to pass a recommendation that says specifically the *how* of land reform. Rather, the Conference agreed on principle that the Churches should support land reform programs and movements suitable to their respective countries and they should set the example with respect to their own landholdings.

Church agricultural landholdings in the Philippines have been considerably reduced ever since the time of the friar

estates. However, we do not seem to know the exact extent of Church landholdings in the Philippines. Bishop Gaviola says that it is minimal, less than 1% of the total landholdings in the Philippines. While he speaks of it in terms of percentage, the *Government Report*, a government propaganda tabloid, reports in terms of figures. In its May 4, 1970 issue, the tabloid published a partial list of Church landholdings, putting it at some 21,000 hectares, making no distinction, however, between actual agricultural lands and those of schools, hospital sites, seminaries, convents, gardens, orchards, and the like. It would seem that the knowledge of the exact extent of Church agricultural landholdings is treasured like Swiss-numbered bank accounts and its revelation does not exactly amount to a *hubris* of a Greek tragedy. For the Church to remain as landlords at a time when the farmers are increasing their demands for lands to till and to own is to invite needless conflicts. It, on the other hand, there are still dioceses which are dependent on agricultural lands for their income, the Archdiocese of Manila has shown and proven that there are far more lucrative and profit-income-generating ventures than agricultural lands.

The second point which I'll try to make has to do with the Christian Church and the question of social justice and economic development. It is indeed fortunate that even before the Tokyo Conference, Fr. John Carroll of the ISO prepared a paper for the NASSA entitled "Toward Priorities for Church Participation in Development Activities in the Philippines: Identifying the Options." This paper, I believe, should be made available to all those interested in the question of Church activities and participation in the developmental process. One of the more important questions he raised was that of social justice and economic development: should one be sacrificed for the other, or should both be made as objectives and worked for simultaneously? Evidently, the Church should work for both objectives. Carroll further states: "Recognizing that there will be a certain amount of social conflict as competing groups struggle to better their positions, the Church might attempt to put the conflict in a moral and ethical context rather than leave it to sheer play of power. Conceivably it could legitimate cer-

tain demands for social justice and reforms while insisting that ways be found to reconcile this with the requirements of social development."

The workshop recognized that social justice should never be sacrificed for economic and statistical figures. Development is always interpreted from the perspective of total human development. The workshop passed three recommendations with regard to this question: the first is Recommendation 2 which states "that the Churches jointly sponsor the creation of a social justice council composed of lawyers, theologians, scientists, farmers' representatives, social workers, and others, to study specific issues of social justice (such as the precise limitation on the right to various forms of property, the proper disposition of an earned increment in property values, just rates of interest on loans, and other issues of similar nature). On the basis of the council's reports, the Churches will take those steps necessary in initiating effective programs by which to act upon such issues. Moreover, the Church shall be urged to work individually and corporately for the corresponding reforms in development in the social, economic, legal, and cultural spheres." This recommendation was made in order to provide the framework by which specific issues on social justice can be discussed openly on an ecumenical basis. Their reports will therefore serve as a basis of concrete programs of action. The creation of such a council will generate discussion on vital issues and ventilate the proper courses of action for the hierarchy and the laymen.

The second recommendation is Recommendation 3, "that the Churches draw up and implement comprehensive plans for social and development education at the grass-roots level, with particular emphasis on the social, economic, and political rights and obligations of the peasants as well as leadership and technical training. The formation of autonomous peasant organizations in this context should receive high priority. It is further recommended that the Churches jointly promote such programs not only on a local but also on a national and Asian regional scale." In passing this recommendation, the Workshop recognized the need for the formation of autonomous peasant

organizations which would protect their own interests, which would ventilate their needs and aspirations, which would act for the protection of their political rights and economic advancement. The role of the Churches in this aspect should be to encourage laymen to go into the organization of such unions that would be free from political and even religious interference. These programs may ultimately result in pressure on the existing power relationships.

The third recommendation, and I will just mention it in passing, is that the Churches promote and expand programs of cooperatives, credit unions, and community development.

The third section is on the Christian Church and the strategy of rural development. Considering the meager resources in personnel and financing, a consolidated effort along ecumenical lines must be made regarding Church projects in rural areas. The problem is more acute, the Indian delegates report, in their own country where in many areas different religious agencies are doing exactly the same work in the same place. This needless duplication could have been avoided had there been prior agreement on coordination and consolidation. Considering the various government agencies involved in rural development programs, what options are available for cooperation? The workshop passed a recommendation that fits into a possible strategy for rural development and this was on the question of agro-industries. Recommendation 6 states: in view of the actual rural underemployment and reduction of the rural employment accompanying the Green Revolution and industrialization, the Churches encourage laymen and women to establish agro-industries and to initiate training programs in this connection, the study and formulation of joint intensive development programs in selected project areas is recommended. A good example of this in the Philippines is Bishop Fortich's Dacung Cogon project in Negros Occidental. With the efforts of the government, private sector and the Church, a sugar central is being built in southern Negros Occidental and its main beneficiaries will be small farmers in the region. These centrals, its organizers hope, will bring hope to the re-

gion, economic development, and employment opportunities for people in the areas.

The last section which I will treat has to do with the Christian Church and the Youth in Rural Development. The workshop passed one recommendation regarding youth participation in the rural development process. It was Recommendation 4: "that the Churches recognize and encourage youth participation as an integral part of the overall process and strategy of rural development from policy formation to direct implementation, and for such purpose, open the organizational structures and facilities to the young who wish to translate their ideas, hopes and enthusiasm into constructive programs of action." The Churches should actively encourage self-reliant projects, organized by the youths, and should go all out to mobilize the masses of rural youth to effectively participate in the various developmental programs of the nation.

Allow me briefly to explain the background of this recommendation. Prior to the Conference in Tokyo, there was a Youth Consultation Conference in Hongkong. The youths who proceeded to Tokyo from the Hongkong Conference raised various questions, among which was youth under-representation in the Conference together with lack of youth participation in the planning and steering of the Conference itself. As a result of these representations, certain changes were made during the Conference itself to accommodate the issues raised by the youth delegates. As a result, the steering committee was expanded to accommodate the workshop representatives, the worship services were changed in order to make them more relevant to the participants and to the Conference itself, the question of development—not in economic terms—was always raised in reaction to the speeches that dealt mostly in terms of statistics and figures. All these incidents would remain a mere footnote of the Conference unless its importance were raised in a forum like this since the Tokyo Conference has its own lessons, especially in dealing with the youth representatives. It would seem difficult at first to see youth representatives work with established structures and procedures, especially those established by authority and tradition. The opening of the Church's

organizational structures to youth participation rests on the assumption that both, by working together, can consolidate energy and experience in the development of the rural sector.

Although the limitation of the youth participation is recognized still their participation should not be limited to minor roles in the overall process. It is in the spirit of this recommendation that youth representation should be encouraged and recognized from policy formation to direct implementation. The Tokyo Conference showed that issues raised by the youth, even if it were a bit late, can be heard and acted upon.

COMMENTS

DR. JUAN FLAVIER

I have very few comments to make. First, I am intrigued by the great possibilities of the parishes as take-off points for rural and agricultural development. How this may be done is still vague in my mind. It can only be done, however, if more people in the parishes can be trained for this purpose, if more technical expertise can be harnessed to help them. We need all the expertise we can get if we are to avoid the needless bungling characteristic of some efforts at rural and agricultural development. Secretary Tanco, I am sure, will agree with me when I say that the work in this area is a science. I know one person, for example, who in the goodness of his heart involved himself in agricultural development. He was a commerce graduate. One day he tried to give a farmer some advice. He said: "Mang Ambo, alam n'yo, yang inyong *repolyo* para magkaroon ng ulo, lagyan ninyo ng bao ng n'yog." I was very much impressed, because of the practicality of the suggestion. Unfortunately, the farmer was not reacting; so he repeated his suggestion. "Mang Ambo, yang inyong *repolyo*, para magkaroon ng ulo, lagyan n'yo ng bao ng n'yog." The farmer then looked up and said: "Opo, salamat po, sa minsan ho gagawin ko, *petsay* ho ito e." So, you know, sometimes in our desire to help our people in terms of rural and agricultural development, we might be hitting at the wrong things.

Second, I am in very great agreement on what has been said here. Everytime I hear the recommendations, however, what pops up in my mind is the question of "how" these can be done. Generally my own strategy would be in terms of the parish—maybe start small. In doing so, our main problem, perhaps, is breaking that vicious cycle of needs: to have capital to start people off in the villages we talk about setting