

Robert Chambers, Managing Rural Development: Ideas and Experience from East Africa. New York: Africana Publishing Corp. and Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1974. 215 pp.

Francis G. Snyder

Based primarily on the author's experience with the Special Rural Development Program (SRDP) in Kenya, this book is addressed to those interested in the practical aspects of rural development. It concentrates on sectoral programs and some forms of area management. Failures of these programs in the 1960's were attributed to insufficient staffing, poor attitudes among civil servants, lack of integration and coordination, and inappropriate organization. Granting the partial validity of these diagnoses, the author argues that the effectiveness of governmental rural development programs may nonetheless be substantially increased by the improvement of management procedures. The book discusses three aspects of rural development management: (1) programming and implementing rural development strategies, which the author considers to be much more important than the elaboration of rural development plans; (2) the management of field staff, especially planning and supervision of their work; and (3) local participation in the formulation and implementation of programs. With respect to each of these, Chambers adduces numerous examples drawn from his own wide experience and reading, synthesizes the lessons to be learned from the past, proposes principles or guidelines for future action, and sets forward practical proposals for the management of staff. In the last two chapters he reviews some of the "frontiers" of rural development, such as the management of planners themselves and the role of rural development research. The appendices provide examples of instructions for programming exercises, meetings, and reports drawn from the SRDP in Kenya.

In addition to the author's discussion of rural development practice and management procedures, this reviewer found the most interesting aspect of the book to be the extent to which the author's essentially practical text confirmed two lessons concerning rural development that have been stressed by more theoretically oriented scholars. The first concerns the relationship between popular participation and equity in rural development. Chambers repeatedly emphasizes that rural development programs to date have, by and large, helped the wealthy and influential and that in many ways "participation" accentuates the

existing patterns of inequality in the distribution of rural wealth and power. In his discussion of participation and equity, he implicitly points to numerous areas that deserve further research. He states, for example, that a "conflict between the aims of good leadership and management on the one hand, and of distribution and equity on the other, is ... likely to be a persistent feature which will remain difficult to overcome" (p. 110). Moreover, as Chambers describes, poor people are invisible to field staff. "It is not just that they neglect them; they do not see them" (p. 80). These comments not only call for more sustained attention by legal scholars and others to the relations between rural development institutions and their social and economic context. They also make clear that rural development strategy and practice are intimately connected to other national policies, such as education, and that the analysis of rural development must be firmly grounded in an understanding of the economic and other factors influencing the operation of the state.

With respect to the role of the state, too, Chambers' discussion tends to reinforce conclusions reached by more theoretically oriented scholars. His concern is primarily with improving management procedures, but he repeatedly stresses that the efficacy of any proposals will ultimately be determined in large part by political will of the state (e.g., pp. 8, 82-83, 113). In one sense this point is a self-evident one, but the extent of coincidence between the conclusions of this relatively practice-oriented study and those of "dependency" or "underdevelopment" theorists is nonetheless striking. This point, again, makes clear the necessity of more attention by legal scholars to the relation of government to national and international social and economic interests in analyzing rural development and other policies in which legal ideas and institutions may play a major role.