

African Studies and Rural Development

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This paper, an introduction to the Workshop entitled “African Rural Development Reconsidered,” has two main objectives: one is to clarify the concept of rural development; the other is to examine the relationship between African studies and the rural development.

“Rural development” is not a sufficiently discussed topic in African studies.¹ Although there are a lot of Africanists studying agriculture and rural problems, only a few of them consider that their specialty is the problem of rural development. Why have Africanists taken this rather passive attitude to the problem? One of the reasons seems to be a specific characteristic of the topic. In many cases, the problem of rural development used to be argued from a normative or technical perspective. In this context, the main concerns are how to intervene in rural society, or how to manage rural development projects. It is difficult to link these practical concerns directly with results of African studies: as their main objective is to understand African society, a more realistic approach is generally preferred.

The second reason may be found in the fact that development strategies after the 1980s have generally been indifferent to this issue. In the 1970s, the issue of rural development was situated at the center of development strategy, thus vitalizing arguments on it. After the 1980s, however, the interest in this topic has rather declined. Moreover, in the tide of economic liberalization policies imposed by the international community, African countries, weakened by lingering crises, lost their economic capability to implement rural development projects. Researchers thus came to talk much more about structural adjustment than rural development.

Consequently, I believe that the problem of rural development should be

¹ Defining African studies is a difficult task, and this is not the main purpose of this paper. Here, African studies are regarded as having almost the same meaning as area studies on Africa. My argument is based mainly on the situation of African studies in Japan.

reexamined in the present context. The reason is clear. At first, the significance of rural development has not changed at all in Africa. As for the urbanization rate in African countries, ranging from 6% (Rwanda) to 83% (Djibouti), the average was 35.5% in 1997 (IBRD [1999]): two thirds of the total population in African countries are inhabitants in rural areas. In addition, agriculture is the most important economic activity for production and employment in many African countries. Rural development should be enhanced in order to promote such an important agricultural sector. Moreover, the problem of poverty is still serious in rural Africa. The majority of African rural areas lack not only electricity and water, but also wells, health services and schools. In short, this developmental issue having long been argued has the same significance as before in Africa.

This means that the development strategy implemented since the 1980s has not been successful to solve the above-mentioned problems. The strategy, attaching the main importance to macro-economic balance, could not achieve sustainable development or poverty alleviation in Africa. Reflections on the present crisis have brought about a revision of the development strategy. This is the second reason for dealing with this problem in the present context. As we will discuss later, the World Bank announced its intention to revitalize the activities on rural development in the mid-1990s. Recent arguments therefore require us to reexamine the meaning and the possibility of rural development in Africa.

In this context, African studies should be linked with the practice of rural development. Although it might be difficult for African studies to directly address practical or normative problems of rural development, a series of facts about rural society clarified by Africanists is indispensable for the practice of rural development. Moreover, today's situation in rural Africa seems to demand a strong contribution of African studies. How can Africanists contribute to this issue? What would be points to be studied in the present situation of rural Africa? This paper tries to deal with such questions.

For this purpose, we should clarify the notion of rural development. "Rural development" is rather a new concept that appeared in the 1970s. The origin and evolution of the concept should be clear in order to examine the relationship with African studies. In the following sections, therefore, we start to shed light on the concept of rural development, and elucidate the evolution of its implications. After that, the relationship between African studies and rural development in the present context will be examined.

I. Notion of Rural Development

We will start by dealing with “development,” a term having various meanings. This is certainly a notion including economic growth, which can be measured quantitatively, for example by national income. But the meaning of “development” is distinct from that of “growth,” because the former implies not only quantitative economic growth, but also qualitative changes in such aspects as organization, institution and culture in society.² Moreover, this qualitative change, in this case, is considered as a “desirable” one. Although we cannot examine here the contents of “desirable” change,³ the term “development” has the implication that such “desirable” change continues during a certain period.

On the other hand, “development” also means the aggregation of intended actions to bring about such change. In this sense, development is a practice of setting a goal to ameliorate the life of a group and transforming the society by political intervention. In Japanese, the difference is clear, as it has two words to translate “development:” “*hatten*” and “*kaihatsu*.” While the term “*hatten*” emphasizes the aspect of autonomous change, the term “*kaihatsu*” puts emphasis on the aspect of political intervention. Interestingly, in request of rural development, the term “*kaihatsu*” is always preferred: “rural development” has been translated, almost unconsciously, as “*nouson* (rural) - *kaihatsu*.” We can therefore consider that the notion of rural development in Japan has been linked with political intervention.⁴

If we understand the term “rural development” literally, it only has a neutral meaning of “development” in a geographically specific “rural” area. In fact, this term is sometimes used without particular implication. Nevertheless, in the context of development studies, the notion of “rural development” has been linked, especially in the 1970s, with a specific policy framework.

As Harriss [1982: 15] has pointed out, the notion of rural development appeared in the 1970s and criticized severely the development policy so far applied in developing countries. The mainstream of Third World development policy in the 1960s attached importance mainly to economic growth through industrialization, which was

² For example, see Hayami [1995: 4].

³ For a discussion about what is “desirable” change, see for example Hoggart & Buller [1987].

⁴ This is not only in the Japanese context; rural development has been the main social policy in the latecomers’ developmental process (See Suehiro [1998]).

to be achieved by the initiative of government. As for policies on rural areas and agriculture, their main goal was the growth of agricultural productivity through modernization. The agricultural mechanization policy was typical in this context. However, being aware of the existence of the massive number of poor in developing countries, criticism against such exclusively growth-oriented policy has increased. This criticism has affected developmental thought, thus making international organizations such as ILO and the World Bank put more emphasis in the 1970s on such issue as poverty alleviation, correction of inequality and fair distribution of developmental results (Esho [1997]).

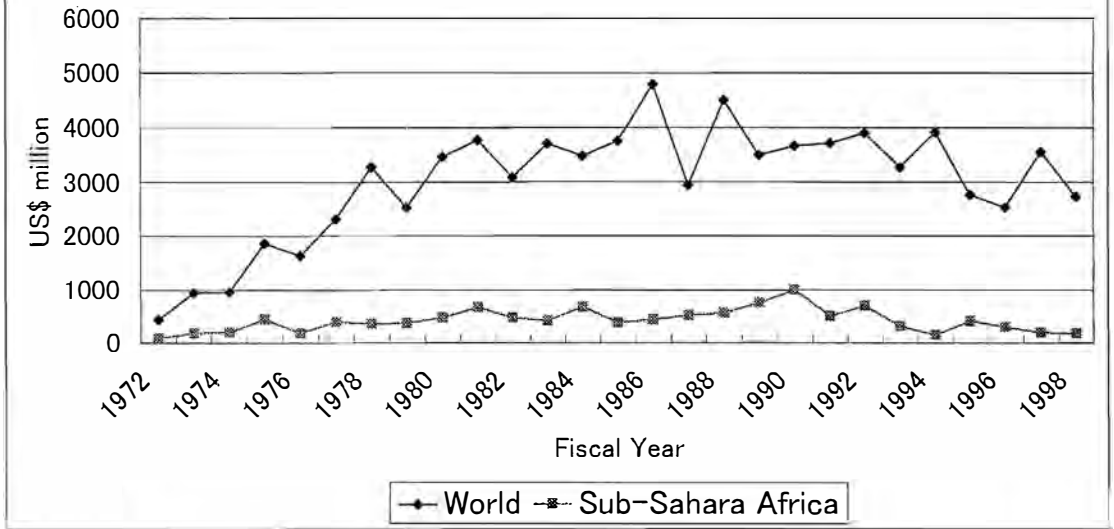
The policy framework for “rural development” appeared with such a change of developmental thought.⁵ When poverty alleviation came to be the central issue in development, it was natural that the rural areas, where the majority of the poor lived, attracted the major concern. The growth-oriented policy so far applied in developing countries had only limited ability to tackle the poverty problem: the trickle-down effect, which means that if economic growth continues, the result trickles down to the poor. On the contrary, the rural development policy confronted directly the critical issue of poverty. “Rural” in the notion of “rural development” meant in this context a place where the poor live. In total, the notion of rural development has been strongly linked with the goal of poverty alleviation, and with the framework for development strategy emphasizing not only economic growth but also distribution and equality. Such an idea of rural development appeared and rapidly spread in the 1970s as the new approach for Third World development.

II. Rural Development and the World Bank

It was the World Bank that played the major role in spreading the notion of rural development in the 1970s. In this section, therefore, the World Bank experience of

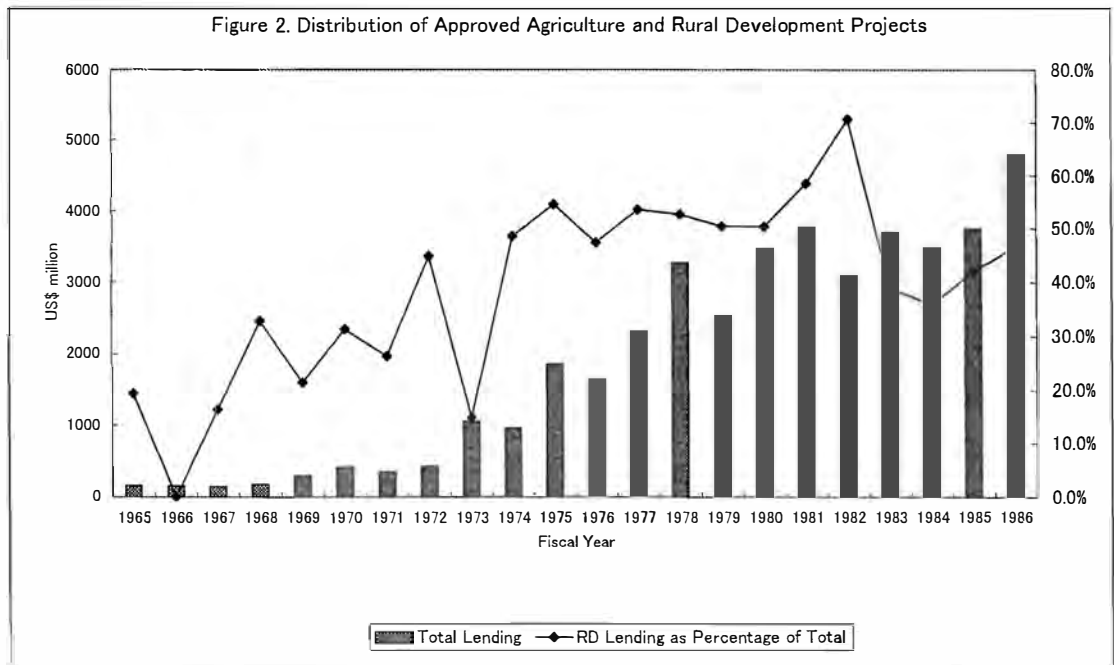
⁵ As the reasons why the rural development policy, targeted on peasants, appeared in the 1970s, Mizuno [1999] mentions four factors. First is that, as the peasant revolution succeeded in several countries in Asia and Latin America in the 1960s, Western countries were eager to ameliorate the living standard of the peasants. Secondly, excessive urbanization has become a serious problem in many developing countries. This has led to international concern about rural poverty as the origin of migration. Third is that technical innovation such as high-yield varieties and fertilizers, progressed rapidly, thus making agricultural investment profitable. Finally, Chinese experience of rural development was highly appreciated internationally. These factors brought international concern to the peasant problem.

Figure 1. World Bank's Lending to the Agricultural Sector (1972-98)



Source: IBRD, World Bank Annual Report; [1974-1998].

Figure 2. Distribution of Approved Agriculture and Rural Development Projects



Source: Based on IBRD [1988b]

rural development will be examined.

The World Bank governor's epoch-making speech in September 1973 declared the adoption of a new policy: rural development. In this "Nairobi Speech," the governor shed light on the significance of poverty alleviation and promised enlarged lending for rural development. The World Bank document in 1975 gave a short and clear definition of rural development.

"Rural development is a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of a specific group of people – the rural poor. It involves extending the benefits of development to the poorest among those who seek a livelihood in the rural areas. The group includes small-scale farmers, tenants and the landless " (IBRD [1975b]).

Rural development was in this sense understood as the most effective strategy for alleviating poverty. As Figure 1 shows, the lending for rural development increased remarkably after the "Nairobi Speech." The World Bank defined a "rural development project" as a "poverty-oriented project" in which "50% or more of the direct benefits accrue to the rural target group" (IBRD [1988b: 4]). Figure 2 indicates that not only the total amount of lending for agriculture and rural development⁶ increased, but also that the ratio of lending for rural development, namely poverty-oriented projects, was enlarged from the end of the 1960s.

One of the characteristics of rural development projects was "Area Development" approach. This is an approach to create a social and economic infrastructure for the rural poor by investing considerable resources in a specific area. The concept of this approach is similar to the "Basic Needs" approach advocated especially by ILO.⁷ "Basic Needs" approach tried to provide the poor with a set of minimum standards of living: consumer goods such as foodstuffs, shelter and clothes, basic services such as potable water, health care and education, and other basic rights for living such as employment and participation in the decision-making process. The "Area Development" approach was a strategy derived from recognition of the cause of poverty being so complex that wide-ranging and simultaneous countermeasures should be taken. This approach was adopted especially for projects in African countries (Mizuno [1999: 21]).⁸

⁶ Lending for the "agriculture and rural development" sector was thus divided into the agriculture (non-poverty-oriented) and rural development (poverty-oriented) sub-sectors. Such a distinction was abolished from the annual report of 1993.

⁷ The World Bank itself did not adopt the "Basic Needs" approach.

⁸ This approach was later criticized for several reasons. The main reasons were the low

Nevertheless, the period was short when rural development was the central issue of development policy. The tide of developmental thought changed once again in the 1980s. Figure 3 shows the ratio of lending for the agricultural (including rural development) sector to total lending. It is clear that the ratio, once it had increased in the 1970s, continued to decline after the 1980s. Although the absolute amount of lending for the agricultural sector increased even in the 1980s, its importance in World Bank activities has clearly decreased.

This trend is related to the change of development strategy adopted by the World Bank. As lending for rural development remarkably increased in the 1970s, the lending for non-projects (later multi-sector) was considerably enlarged in the 80s. This was not lending for particular projects, but was admitted under strict conditions of economic policy. Figure 4 indicates the evolution of lending for the agricultural sector and for the non-project sector. The latter, which increased rapidly in the 1980s, exceeded the former in the 1990s. This increase in the later, indicating the development of structural adjustment lending, reflects the change in the Bank's strategy for lending, and thus for development.

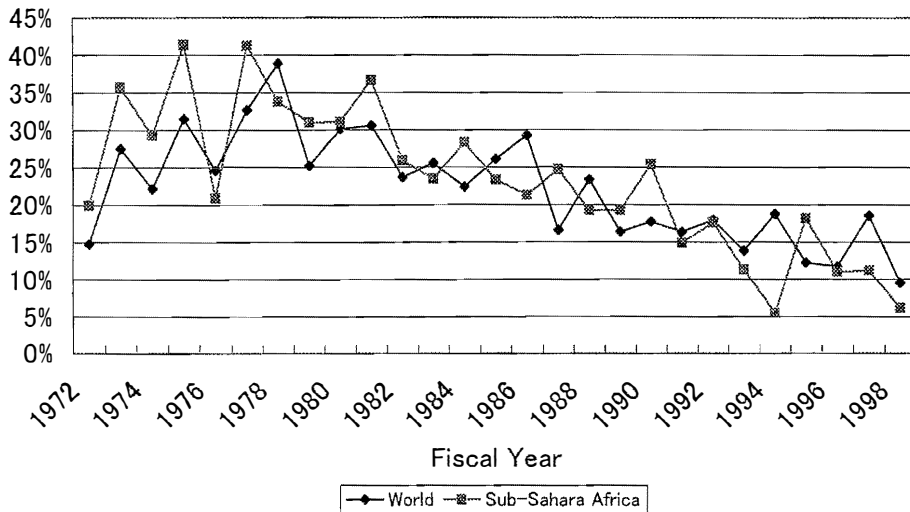
The World Bank's Operations Evaluation Department carried out an assessment of its rural development programs and published the result (IBRD [1988b]). While the report emphasized the significance and the fruit of the rural development program, it also pointed out several problems with it. Two points are especially important in order to understand the change in development strategy.

The first one is the non-coherence between rural development projects and macro-economic policy. The report pointed out that macro-economic policy was often not advantageous for the agricultural or rural sector. If macro-economic policy created conditions that acted against the agricultural sector, it could considerably reduce the significance of projects. Price policy and exchange policy are especially important as they determine the terms of trade for farmers. As rural development is not a charity for the poor, but support for the development, it is natural that donors have considerable concern that recipient countries define appropriate economic policy for the agricultural sector. Such recognition led to the Bank's policy of guidance on appropriate macro-economic policy, namely the structural adjustment policy.

The second point is the problem of management in rural development projects. The report stressed the significance of local inhabitants' participation in the

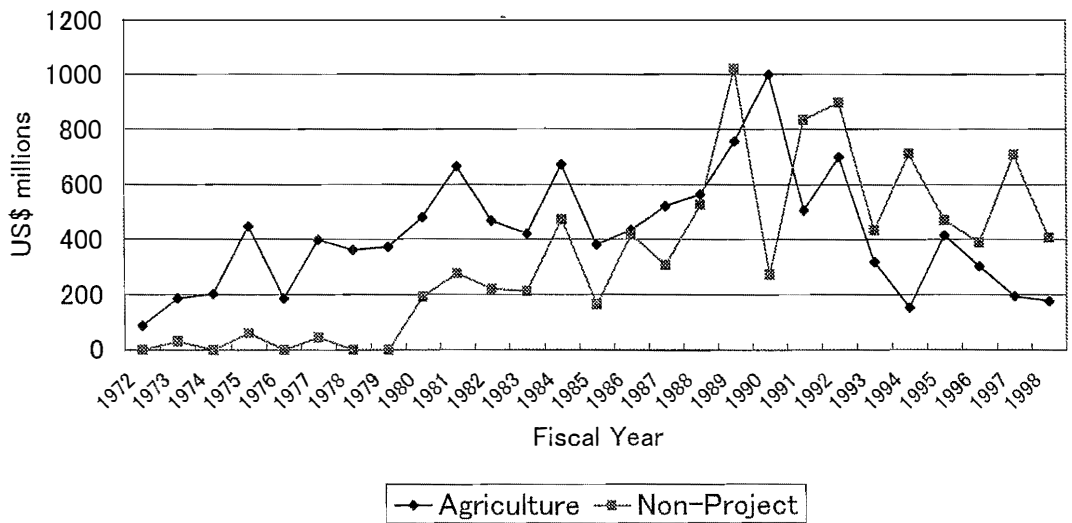
rate of return and the possibility that a small proportion of the people could get a disproportionate share of resources (IBRD [1988b: 22-26]).

Figure 3. Ratio of World Bank's Lending to the Agricultural Sector



Source: IBRD, World Bank Annual Report, [1974 - 1998].

Figure 4 World Bank's Lending to the Agricultural Sector and Non-Project Sector (for African Countries)



Source: IBRD, World Bank Annual Report, [1974 - 1998].

process of planning and managing projects. It also emphasized the necessity to establish a feedback system in order to resolve discovered problems in an ongoing project. This recognition led to the recent strategy of decentralizing the project management or transferring it to NGOs. On the other hand, the report pointed out that strong commitment from government was necessary for the success of a project. This means that the political leadership or the administrative capacity inevitably influenced the project management. This point, relating to the problem of governance or the State, brought into the argument capacity building or human development in the context of development strategy.

Although the ratio of the World Bank's agricultural sector lending to total lending has tended to decline, this fact does not by itself mean that the Bank came to regard the problem of poverty as insignificant. It should be interpreted that lending for poverty alleviation tends to be dispersed among several sectors such as social, environment, or urbanization.⁹ In this sense, the Bank seems to have looked for a new strategic position on rural development.¹⁰ Since the mid-1990s, the Bank has been trying to revitalize rural development. In 1996, they formulated an action plan, indicating its policy for agriculture, rural development and natural resource management.¹¹ Since that year, every annual report of the Bank has emphasized the importance of rural development. Rural development was selected in 1998 as one of six strategically important activities of the Bank;¹² this activity is now understood not to be the sole method for poverty alleviation, but as an important domain to tackle many related problems such as food security and resource management.

III. Perspectives on Rural Development in Africa

It may still be too early to assess the new rural development strategy of the 1990s. However, from the experience of rural development until the 1980s, we can imagine that there were several problems responsible for the policy change. How has

⁹ For the recent perspective of the World Bank for poverty alleviation, see IBRD [1990b].

¹⁰ It was symbolic that the Bank has abolished the lending category for "rural development" in its annual report since 1993. The distinction in the agricultural sector between non-poverty-oriented and poverty-oriented (namely rural development) was criticized as meaningless in the evaluation report in 1988.

¹¹ See IBRD [1996: 55-56].

¹² See IBRD [1998: 80].

this experience of rural development in Africa been assessed or evaluated? In this section, we compare the assessments of African rural development projects by the World Bank and by Africanists. This comparison of perspectives will help to clarify the specificity of each approach.

Table 1 shows the result of audited rural development projects financed by the World Bank between 1974 and 79 (fiscal years). This table indicates several facts about rural development projects in Africa (Sub-Sahara African countries are separated between East Africa and West Africa in the table). Compared with other areas, African projects are many in number, small in the size of loan and project cost, and high in the ratio of failure. In short, many rural development projects that were relatively small in the size were carried out in Africa, but the World Bank judged many of them as failures.

Table.1 Audited Rural Development Projects, FY74-79, by Region

	East Africa	West Africa	East Asia & South Asia Pacific	Europe, Middle East & N. Africa	Latin America & Caribbean	Total	
Number of Projects	20	30	14	21	14	13	112
Average Size of Loan (US\$M)	10.8	14.3	27.7	39.0	26.1	40.0	24.4
Average Project Cost (US\$M)	17.3	34.4	82.1	104.7	77.1	95.7	63.0
Project Failure: Number	15	12	4	4	3	3	41
Rate	75%	40%	29%	19%	21%	23%	37%

Source: IBRD[1988b:127]

The assessment by the Bank was therefore severe about rural development in Africa. We should be aware that the judgment on whether a project succeeded or not was made according to the simple criterion of economic rate of return: a project was considered success if its economic rate of return was over 10% at project completion. The report itself admitted that such a criterion was “arguable” (IBRD [1988b: 18]). In addition, as African countries had a generally poor economic infrastructure, the spread effect tended to be low, thus causing a low economic rate of return.¹³

However, the economic rate of return was not the only problem with rural development projects in Africa. The Bank’s report pointed out several more problems

¹³ Although the notion of rural development appeared in criticizing the development strategy centered on economic infrastructure investment, the Bank proposed to positively reevaluate such investment (IBRD [1988b: xv]). They admitted that investment for the economic infrastructure was necessary and useful for poverty alleviation in such areas as Africa, where the infrastructure was too poor to spread the effect of a project.

with projects in Africa. Particularly that of project planning and management was sometimes a serious problem. The report stated, “In too many cases, ..., especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, rural development lending was supply-driven by funds and project slots and the need to meet arbitrary target criteria, rather than demand-driven by sound strategies and realistic, well prepared proposals”(IBRD [1988b:xviii]). In addition to the problem of economic rate of return, the Bank therefore judged that rural development projects in Africa also had serious problems with project management in general.

How then have Africanists regarded the African experience of rural development? At first, let us summarize Yoshida’s research analyzing Tanzanian rural development (1987; 1989). Tanzania, under the Nierere government, declared its socialist-oriented policy in the “Arusha Declaration” of 1967. Their “Ujamaa socialism” attached importance to the agricultural sector and rural area. In most parts of rural Tanzania, peasants used to live in scattered dwellings and they did not form villages. As a socialist program, the government tried to form villages in order to later establish village-owned communal farms. This was considered as the most effective way to modernize rural areas and increase agricultural production. Initially, the government promised to respect peasants’ intentions when they promoted this villagization. Changing the attitude in 1973, however, the government enforced measures to make peasants move in order to form “Ujamaa” villages. Peasants’ opinions were no longer respected in the operation. This policy, in addition to damage by drought, caused a sharp decrease in food production in 1973 and 1974. Moreover, export crop production such as cashewnuts continued to decline because of inappropriate pricing policy. The government continued to carry out the villagization policy despite the resistance of peasants, but they renounced the plan of common farms. They finally adopted a liberalistic agricultural policy in 1982, and the rural development policy based on “Ujamaa socialism” thus came to an end.

This is the well-known story of Ujamaa policy, which has generally been assessed as a complete failure. On this point, in admitting the failure of the policy as it could not achieve its initial goal, Yoshida pointed out at the same time some important effects brought about by Ujamaa policy. Among the socialist measures implemented in rural areas, while communal farm policy has totally disappeared, the villagization policy has borne some fruits. While it is certain that the villagization policy led to temporary decrease in food production, it took root in many rural Tanzania and helped to establish local administrative organizations. Although the environmental problem around villages remains to be solved, the infrastructure was generally ameliorated

because the government constructed such facilities as simply-made water services, elementary schools, health care centers, and cereal storage. Such changes could be positively evaluated as they established social and economic bases for the future development of rural areas. He thus called attention to the fact that Ujamaa policy has achieved one of its purposes.

The next example is Muroi's research on Nigeria (1987, 1989). Nigeria actively promoted several agricultural and rural development programs from the mid-1970s. Muroi analyzed two of the programs: the large-scale irrigation program financed mainly by the government, and "integrated rural development program" financed mainly by the World Bank.¹⁴ Self-sufficiency in food was the main goal of both of these projects. The latter program was intended especially for small-scale farmers, as the Bank financed it. Although abundant oil money was allocated for these programs, Nigerian food production did not sufficiently increase. Though some strategically important food crops were selected (wheat and rice in large-scale irrigation programs, and maize in the "integrated rural development program"), the result was not satisfactory in either case. Neither the production of wheat nor of rice increased. The production of maize augmented, but the increase was mainly due to the provision of very cheap fertilizer: the government expended great amount to subsidize it. Moreover, in the former program, many peasants were enforced to move from their homeland because of the construction work. In the latter case, the project caused structural corruption such as the illegal marketing of subsidized fertilizer.

While pointing out such problems with the projects, Muroi posed an important question: how did the rural development policy affect the "relations of production" in rural areas. Although both the two programs could not ameliorate Nigerian self-sufficiency in food, they did affect considerably on rural society, causing new situations: land appropriation, creation of opportunity for wage labor, distribution of fertilizer, introduction of new varieties, etc. In other words, peasants were obliged to react to such new situations. Muroi's findings in northern Nigeria, where many development projects were implemented, were that commodity production developed rapidly, and that wage labor and commercialization of land became increasingly apparent. Such changes, however, did not lead directly to the polarized differentiation premised by classical Marxist analysis: the dichotomy between capitalists and agricultural laborers. Impressive examples were that peasants started to earn money as wage laborers, but they always hold the usufruct of land; the land was not totally

¹⁴ The latter project was also assessed in IBRD [1988b].

commercialized, only the usufruct in the dry season was commercialized. In summary, they were always “imperfect” transformations from the theoretical point of view. Muroi maintained that capitalistic forces represented by rural development programs might only have “articulated” the indigenous rural society.

Two Japanese Africanists have pointed out problems with the rural development program in Africa: enforcement by the government, ineffectiveness and corruption of the bureaucracy, inappropriate macro-economic policy, and lack of local participation. These points by themselves are almost the same as those claimed in the report by the World Bank. But two of the Africanists stressed an important point which was not mentioned in the Bank’s evaluation report: even if political interventions in the name of rural development could not achieve its goal in a short period or failed by the judgment of the cost-benefit analysis, it surely deeply influenced the rural area in the long run, and had an effect in promoting the social transformation. Even if a development project failed, the rural area could not be the same as it was before the implementation of the project. In addition, as Muroi maintained, such political intervention tended to promote the long-term indigenous transformation of rural societies rather than change them completely. In this sense, the rural development programs after the 1970s can be understood in the context of the rural modernization programs, successively carried out in rural Africa from the colonial period.

IV. African Studies and Rural Development

As we have explained, the notion of rural development was closely linked with the strategy of development that had been adopted by international organizations when it spread rapidly in the 1970s. However, the rural development strategy of the 1970s based on the “Area Development” approach became obsolete. The structural adjustment policy in the 1980s, certainly, could create a favorable economic environment for agriculture by adjusting price and exchange rate, but it had no effective measure to alleviate poverty. It is difficult to claim that a “trickle down” effect was produced in Africa by the structural adjustment policy. After all, we do not have, at the present moment, a dominant development strategy: each strategy has its merits and limitations.

Taking such a situation into account, discussing the problem of rural development from the standpoint of African studies has great significance today. Now that the framework for development strategy has become unclear, research on rural development should not be confined to technical arguments within a specific strategy.

The realistic approach of African studies can contribute to a normative approach for rural development, and vice versa. I will indicate lastly several important points to reconsider in the relationship between African studies and rural development.

First, the autonomous development process of rural societies should be much more analyzed in the discussion about rural development. Studies of rural development are not the same as studies of “rural development projects.” Various aspects of rural transformation, with which many Africanists have tackled, should be treated in studies of rural development.¹⁵ In this context, studies on the impact of rural development projects from the long-term perspective are very important. It is true that a cost-benefit analysis of a specific project has certain significance, but African studies can contribute much more to analyze the impact of projects on rural society or the direction of social changes in the long term.

Second, understanding the “logic” of rural society is crucial not only for African studies, but also for the success of a rural development project. As rural development projects are generally managed by the donors’ staff, the funding and logic come from the external world, so responsible of project management often alienates the local people. Many researchers have mentioned this point and proposed ways to solve problem.¹⁶ Such prescriptions as decentralization of the project, local participation and introduction of a sociological method for research can be interpreted as trials to tackle the problem. As Africanists, especially anthropologists, have actively studied the social structure of rural societies, their results would be useful to examine the solution to this problem.

Third, as rural development projects involve the administration and are influenced by politics, research on them naturally relates to the problem of the African State and its governance. Recent African studies, especially in the field of political science, have produced many interesting results on this topic.¹⁷ Such a realistic approach would be useful for the practice of organizing a rural development project.

The last point is related to the current situation in rural Africa. Following the recent politico-economic changes in Africa, the rural area is confronted with new and difficult problems. Problems of the environment and resource management, for which the World Bank has strengthened its effort, may be one of these issues. I want here to point out the significance of researches into the disastrous situation in rural areas.

¹⁵ In this sense, Hoggart & Buller [1987] is an interesting work. Dealing with mainly developed countries, it sheds much light on the various aspects of rural development.

¹⁶ For example, see Chambers [1983]).

¹⁷ For example, See Bayart [1989], Chabal [1992] and Chabal & Daloz [1999].

This is a problem recently highlighted by the outbreak of famine and, especially, intensified conflicts. When a famine breaks out, it is mainly the rural areas that are affected. Refugees and the internally displaced that are produced by conflicts could cause the same damage. Africa has recently seen many incidents causing serious damage in rural areas. If initial emergent measures are to be taken by humanitarian organizations such as UNHCR, it is necessary to establish a long-term development plan at an early stage. Considering that the disaster in rural Africa is, unfortunately, no longer an exception, we should discuss how to deal with such a disaster and how to recover the damage created in rural areas. It is therefore necessary and useful to study this topic of rural development by linking with the results of African studies. Although research on the causes, effects and prescriptions for the disaster in rural areas are not yet sufficient,¹⁸ the significance and necessity of such studies should be recognized.

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¹⁸ As an example of such research, see for example Bascom [1998]. Wageningen University (The Netherlands), having an organization of Disaster Studies in their Rural Development Sociology Group, produces interesting works on this issue such as Hilhorst & van Leeuwen [1999].

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