

# Villages: the forgotten resource

An interview with  
Revelians Tuluhungwa

DF continues its look at the current rethink of development which it began last month with a review at global level by Ponna Wignaraja, Secretary-General of the Society for International Development. The same question is put again—what has the world learned in 25 years of development—but at other levels? The village, the nation state and the region? R.P. Misra, Deputy Director of the UN Centre for Regional Development reviews regional progress (p. 5) while Miguel Urrutia, Vice-Rector of the United Nations University's Development Studies Division looks at national level development (p. 4). The grassroots are the focus for the first of these perspectives in the interview below on village development with Revelians Tuluhungwa, Chief of UNICEF's Project Support Communications Service.

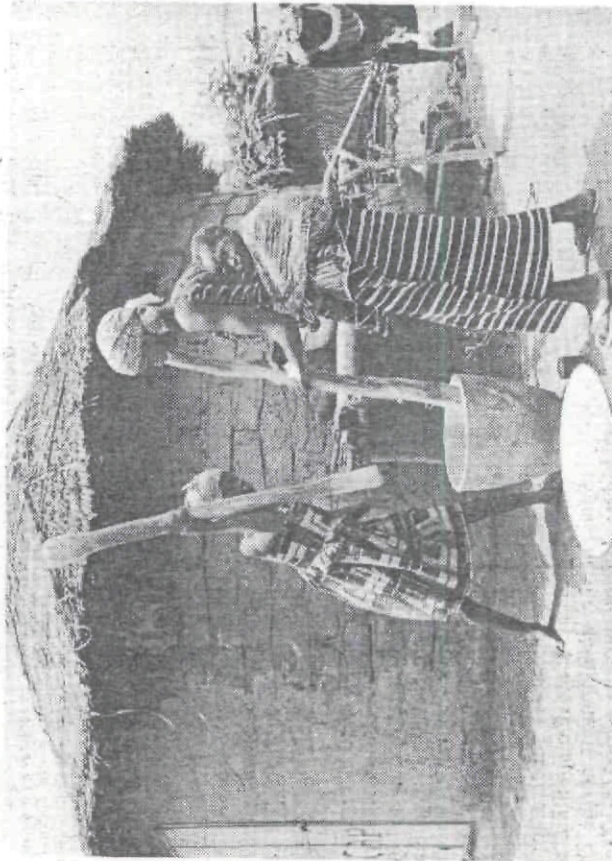
**DE** How to achieve development, at what pace, in what direction and with what degree of equity has preoccupied us for the last 25 years. But there are now no certainties. Could you outline how attitudes to development have shifted over the last quarter century?

**Tuluhungwa:** The shifts have arisen because of misconceived development strategies. These were based on investment in infrastructures with the hope that the rise in GNP would trickle down benefits to the village level. They were centred on economic perspectives and overlooked essential social questions at the village level. They overlooked the dynamics of political awareness which arose at the village level. The thinking now is that if you can invest more in social development, which involves

looking at the old traditional social structures and utilizing them for increasing production by the people, utilizing them for improving understanding of issues affecting their health, food production and their mental ability, then there will be hope that income from cash crops will be invested back into agriculture, hygiene and improvements in the quality of life.

**IDE** Why do you think that villages were largely ignored or downgraded in development thinking in the past?

**Tuluhungwa:** Most of the development models adopted in the Third World were based on models received from the West and transported there wholesale. People did not realize that the base level of development in the



Women pounding millet into flour in Matourkou, Upper Volta.

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Third World was quite different from the West. Specifically the models had an economic base, private enterprise with a cash economy, but poor countries ran on a subsistence base and with less developed technology. The models did not fit—at least not the majority of poor people, but they did fit the minority élites who had the education to benefit from them and who got what returns there were. Now the thinking is that the masses, with increased awareness, will look for more participation in the benefits arising from their cash crops produced by their cheap labour. So now we see there are some development activities that people can under-

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take themselves with some assistance from the government and the international community.

**DE** *Could you give us an example of a project which might have been popular 10 or 20 years ago, but which would no longer be popular today in the light of new thinking?*

**Tuluhungwa:** There was a very high investment in dams on the assumption that irrigation would increase the agricultural capacity of each family. But take, for example, sugar cane. High investment in the 1960s in big estates lured the family holdings alongside into growing sugar. The result is that people have more money which they use on prestige purchases. But more problems are created, since land used for sugar is not used for family food growing. No social infrastructure was created to absorb the cash inflow so that increased drinking and family breakups occurred. So with more money there were more health and social problems than before.

**DE** *What would be a typical project that would be appropriate under the new thinking about village level development?*

**Tuluhungwa:** Well, let's look at a village. A typical developing country village is a social unit with forces that keep it working together. The development agencies are now doing more social analysis of the situation, they are looking at the social and communications structure and are using what exists as a bench mark so that economic development is accompanied by improving technology and by strengthening social administration through education, skills-learning and through community and government supports. This is what is happening in most developing countries which have gone in for rural development as a way of getting assistance closer to the community.

**DE** *Have the international donors and aid agencies changed their priorities to fit in with the new approach?*

**Tuluhungwa:** Well, excluding the politics, I would say the attitude is changing but not fast enough. Governments are sensitive about international agencies involved in community development, but I have seen most agencies putting strong community education components into their work. Be it health education, agricultural extension education or development support communication, call it what you will, this is the trend now. The problem is that the

local structures of government are not designed to accommodate this requirement. And in UNICEF we have found that governments do not have people trained to grasp what this is all about, or trained to implement that sort of component as an integral part of the project. The vision is there, but the manpower is limited.

**DE** *Can we turn to the question of the skills involved. How do you view education responding to changes in the approach to development in villages?*

**Tuluhungwa:** Let us look at it on two fronts. One is the formal education for children, primary schools through to universities. This formal education is based on a white-collar curriculum. If it were based on a development curriculum then in 15 years time the people would be more development oriented. The other education system is professional training. This has concentrated on increasing the professional competence of the extension workers, mid-level management, of doctors and engineers. It has overlooked the role of these people in development, apart from the professional side of their jobs: engineering for human-based development programmes, medicine for community health. So there is another lack, something else missing.

**DE** *Now many people from developing countries do post-graduate degrees in industrialized countries. Do you feel the teaching given is*

*relevant to the requirements of developing countries?*

**Tuluhungwa:** Most of the institutions of higher learning in the developed countries are designed and operated on the basis of the needs of that particular country. But also they feel this obligation to train people from the developing world. Nevertheless people from that developing world have to fit into that curriculum. The student does a good job but when he goes back home he finds that the infrastructure he needs is non-existent. This all leads to a lot of frustration. It pushes people to leave their countries and seek employment in the country where they got their higher education.

**DE** *Could you outline the importance of communication in the approach to villages in developing countries?*

**Tuluhungwa:** Communication is both a process of social interaction, of learning and also a matter of techniques. The

problem is that many development agencies and many governments have looked at communication as information "per se", also as techniques. So a Ministry of Health official will define health education as the production of several radio programmes based on a textbook developed by a doctor, or a series of posters to be hung on trees in the villages. Now both of those fail to help a farmer understand why he needs a latrine and how to build a latrine. It does not help him to understand why his children should be immunized or why a polio vaccine has to be three doses. It does not teach farmers fertilizer-use or post-harvest storage. So communications is a process in a programme whereby if there is a food or education programme one should look at what kind of orientation the technicians who are going to work on the programme need—i.e. in terms of their capacity to explain the programme to the villagers and generate motivation and participation. One must also look at what kind of community education is needed to enable the villagers to participate, benefit and then care for the project when the external funding is over. So we are talking more of development as an education of the mind, as social change, as having more access to information and to learning skills. It goes beyond merely divulging or propagating information.

**DE** *You obviously have a great affection for villages. Do you feel it is important, for the future, that the rural sector should be healthy? Why do villages have to be treated with such attention?*

**Tuluhungwa:** In most countries, most of the populations live outside the cities. The cities expect rural people to produce food to support them and other less fortunate parts of the countryside. If the rural areas cannot feed themselves, the people who eventually suffer most are the people in the cities. Governments understand this. My respect for the village is based on the fact that I was born in one, I have worked in a village and I have seen the wealth of human resources that exists there. Their demands are not great if they can be assured that their crops will be good, that they can sell their surplus at a good

price, that they can buy a new dress, cope with the diseases that afflict their children, buy a radio, or that sort of thing.

**DE** The potential of technology as the key to development is a very popular cause. This is very evident in the area of communications where there have been remarkable changes in communications technology. Has this potential been realized?

**Tuluhungwa:** Not as much as it should have been by 1982. Let me illustrate: for political reasons governments have invested in TV stations which run five to eight hours a day in most countries. When you examine the programmes you will find it rare to have even five per cent of the time allocated to educational programmes. One reason is that those involved have nothing to do with the sectors of government responsible for development. It is the Ministry of Information, not Planning, Health or Agriculture who controls programming. The development sectors themselves look at communications as a kind of appendage to a project or programme. Any typical project description has a last paragraph which says "community education is going to play a big part in this programme—therefore US\$5,000 are reserved for it!" The \$5,000 will go on a public relations brochure for the project or maybe after two years someone will say, "Hey, the programme's not going well, can we get a communicator to come in and do something about it?" So by the time they get someone, there will only be \$2,000 remaining, enough to produce one radio programme. Now what *SHOULD* be done? Our experience shows that an experienced communicator should be called in *right at the beginning*. He should plan the communication component by gathering data and help the agency to design ways through which the villagers can participate in the information side. Otherwise they are passive. Gathering data is essential so you know what educational objectives there should be. You should aim at community education, behaviour change, and last, skills acquisition. What sort of data? You need to establish the knowledge gaps, find out what they do now, for example on the nutrition side; what do they do now when a child gets kwashiorkor, signs of hookworm, measles, etc. You need to know the communications available now. What radios are there? Batteries, is there a supply? If the radio programmes are for women, find out simple things such as whether women are allowed to switch on radios when husbands are not home? At what times do women listen? One has to go through all this. Then among the objectives of the major programme you should find your communication objectives too. So resources are divided according to objectives and the question of \$5,000 stuck on the end does not arise. At the implementation stage the communications go along with the rest of the objectives and are also monitored.

**DE** Do you feel that it goes for technology in general that faith is not enough. The availability of technology is not sufficient to guarantee its use?

**Tuluhungwa:** Existing communications technology is sufficient for development needs. Where we have not succeeded is on the conceptual side. How can the technology be used? Secondly, we have not got the design of the messages sorted out. For example, sophisticated urban folk in rich countries may learn from video cassettes but, for poor rural folk, maybe it has to be drama. Where we have gone wrong is in the prior analysis that should have determined the choice of technology.

ous metamorphosis triggered by global financial problems. People feel they should have used human resources more, reforming the educational system, looking into local technology—the ox plough before the tractor, etc. Tractors were not used efficiently because the infrastructure was not there—no mechanics, poor maintenance. In some countries you find tractors running well in villages because the technology is there. In India say. But in Africa the same tractor does not run! Now, by the year 2000 it is estimated that on average 60 per cent of the population of developing countries will be urban. And 61 per cent of growth in urban population will be from within the towns and cities themselves. So you are getting increasing numbers of people with no skills, who can find no jobs.

**"Most developing countries can adapt a great deal of existing technology..."**



*New technology is needed to ease village women's tasks.*

UNESCO

**DE** Does this lesson apply to technology in general, for agriculture for example?

**Tuluhungwa:** Yes. Technologies at the village level exist already but perhaps they have been overtaken. The principles for introducing new technologies are similar. So that with industry, too, you must apply the same criteria before you decide on what technology to bring in.

**DE** On a final note, can you say if the experience acquired has demonstrated whether developing countries are going to follow a different path from the industrialized countries. Can they avoid the recapitulation of massive urbanization, environmental devastation and all the other disasters which have befallen the richer countries?

**Tuluhungwa:** Development models in the Third World are undergoing a seri-

Governments are concerned with supporting the 40 per cent left in the rural areas, helping them to make a living and also in dealing with the urban problems. So they are thinking of small industries not the giant companies. That is where communications will play a big part, especially with training. The people have no skills and may have to be trained even to use a hammer or a small electrical tool. So communication again reappears as vital to skills training and on how to market produce without being exploited by middlemen. So you see, I think we can say that we have learned something over the last 25 years. ■



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