

POTENTIAL FOR INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT

by
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During their past seven years the Northern and Eastern regions of this island have been engulfed in conflicts of major dimensions. These conflicts have had far reaching consequences for, and impacts upon, the lives and modes of living, of the people of these regions. There will probably never be a count of the lives that were lost. Those who could leave these regions for other parts of the country or for other parts of the world have left and many of them are not likely to return. Much of the infrastructure of these regions in the form of buildings, communication networks, and equipment have either been badly damaged, or destroyed beyond redemption. The economic base of these areas has also been badly affected.

In the dark days of the Battle of Britain many of the great cities of that country were razed to the ground. Out of these ruins and ashes have arisen new cities some of which at least are more beautiful in conception, in design and in execution.

There is a great lesson to be learnt from the post-war experiences of such countries. We have a great opportunity given to us now arising out of our misery, to rebuild.

The basic philosophy of future development should not be limited to mere resettlement and rehabilitation and the perpetua-

tion of the helpless, down trodden refugee mentality. A firm positive approach has to pervade all planning for development which must be based on new initiatives a vision for the future, firmly anchored on the available resource base and involving the participation of the people to the fullest extent possible.

In this scheme of things it is essential to ensure that there shall be no adhoc planning and development aimed at short-term and ephemeral gains. Instead a carefully considered, rigorously planned and a realistically phased integrated plan of development needs to be evolved for the region.

Human Resource

The greatest natural and renewable resource of the North and the East lies in its own peoples. It is unfortunate that a very considerable part of that resource has been lost to us through death, grave injury and flight.

In order that the ideas that I present may be achieved we have to bring together as rapidly as possible the men and women who have accumulated over the years by work by research and by experience, the knowledge and database that must form the basis for development planning. They should be drawn into a pool of experts.

In the recent past a number of consultancy groups have appeared. One must be cautious

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because work experience overseas or in international agencies does not necessarily make one the most competent person on a local subject.

Education System

In any redevelopment strategy attention must be paid to school and university education. The children of today will be our leaders in the early decades of the 21st century, and an education system must be evolved directed toward bringing out the best in the great potential reservoir of our children.

It is insufficient to rebuild the system in the form and content that existed before. Equal opportunity for education and equal opportunity for employment are the inalienable right of every child, whatever his economic background and social status. The school and university system must be redesigned to ensure this.

The school system should be built up of tiers, a principle that has also been enunciated by the Presidential Commission on Youth Unrest - the primary school, the lower secondary and the higher secondary. Every such school should be carefully located in relation to population and built up into equal facility institutions. There should be full

community participation in the management and development of the school and its activities.

The universities of these regions have to be encouraged to develop into lead organisations, not only producing trained person, but also and more importantly, producing a continuous stream of ideas and initiative with which to maintain the forward march of the development process.

On the one hand they have to ensure a flexibility of course structure and teaching strategies which will enable them to transfer to their students the great advances that are continuously taking place in the various fields of intellectual activity and on the other they have to direct all their energies and attention to developing the database and the initiatives needed by the new economy. In addition to the traditional areas of teaching and of learning, the universities should be able to produce graduates whose training is related to needs and who can find avenues of employment within the country or outside without becoming a burden on the state. High level courses should be made available in fields like nursing, pharmacy, special technical skills, in relation to agriculture and industry.

A very early start must be made on a Institute of Coastal and Marine Sciences. The North and the East have a coastline that extends from Mannar in the North West to Pottuvil on the East coast. The activities along these areas have to be planned in an integrated fashion and include coastal fishing, fishery harbour development and the protection of coastal resources.

Such an Institute could very well be based in Trincomalee where the Tamil University Movement I believe, acquired land many years ago with the purpose of building a University Institution for the Tamil speaking people.

Integrated Development

Any overall plan must address itself to a range of issues. The more important of which are:

1. Transport and communication

A good network of well constructed and well maintained roads is fundamental to all others aspects of development. Trunk roads should connect Mannar to Jaffna, Jaffna to Kilinochchi, Mullativu, Trincomalee, Batticaloa down to Pottuvil. At appropriate points this trunk route system should connect to the national network. The objective should be rapid and comfortable transportation of people and products within the North and East and out to the rest of the island. The present rail network appears to be adequate but needs to be strengthened to develop transportation at speeds much higher than presently in operation. The internal network within the region should also be subjected to review and reconstruction.

2. Management and Conservation of Water Resources

The water resources of the North are based on natural ground water storage in the peninsula and the adjacent areas. The East is more for-

tunate in having man-made reservoirs and river systems while the regions North of Vavuniya have also had reservoir-based systems for a long time.

The ground water system is being charged by rainfall during three months of the year. It supports an extensive system of wells on which people of the peninsula totally depend. This very precious source has been misused, mismanaged and polluted over many years; primarily due to lack of understanding and knowledge.

In order to increase agricultural productivity, fertilisers and insecticides have been used extensively. With extraction of water by pumps too much water has been extracted and partially cycled than is actually necessary. This process of cycling has meant that there is an accumulation of nitrates and other harmful pollutants in the ground water.

Expert study and analysis is required of the ground water system and a policy of scientific extraction and management should be developed. Extension services should educate the farmer in order to use the water resources at optimum levels with minimal inputs of pollutants.

With regard to the tanks and flowing system of channels an overall assessment and study should be made in order to establish patterns for rehabilitation, expansion and proper use.

3. *Agricultural Practices and Land Use*

Land wherever it is, is a very valuable and limited resource. This is especially so in the regions under consideration. An overall Land use strategy for the North and the East should ensure that every acre of land is assigned to its appropriate use, assessed on sound scientific basis.

The development of agricultural practice should have as its objective a farming population that does not exist merely at subsistence levels. The aim should be to produce a farming community which is prosperous and forms the backbone of society and the economy.

This is an appropriate stage in our development to reassess the crops that are produced and farming practices used. The fact that a particular crop has existed or been produced in a particular area earlier does not necessarily mean that it is the best. There is talk of developing a Palmyrah plantation industry. The Palmyrah Palm was able to support a much smaller population a century ago. Since then the population has grown and needs have changed radically. It is a fallacy to assume that the palm and its products can ever again play a critical role in the economy of the North or East.

We have witnessed over the years changes made by farmers in crops they grow in response to demand. Where once tobacco was grown, we

have had onions and chillies. Two fairly recent innovations in farming practice merit special mention; these are the production of potatoes and growing of grapes.

The possibility of producing value-added agro-based products for local and foreign consumption should be actively pursued. This will demand an integration of appropriate land use, production processing and marketing. Are these areas appropriate for instance, for orchards of Mango, supplying a canning factory complex?

Part of the coastline has sandy beaches backed by sand dune systems. In parts of India such areas have been planted extensively with *Casuarina* plants, forming plantations. Multiple benefits accrue from such plantations. Fuelwood can be obtained by regular cropping and replanting. The soil is improved and consolidated. The environment becomes less harsh than before.

Wherever possible community based integrated projects should be established centering round a seasonal tank. Seasonal tanks can be used for large scale fish production as a community enterprise.

4. *Animal Husbandry*

It is necessary to move from a subsistence approach to a commercial and value added approach. Herds of cattle or isolated animals are mostly of poor quality. Levels of milk and meat production tend to be quite low. Artifi-

cial insemination programmes help to improve stock but transformation is slow and quality improvement may be unstable. The technology of embryo transplants of high grade embryos into local cows is feasible and can yield good results over a short time frame. In projects such as these, villages centred around tanks should be selected. Close supervision of transplant, care of cows, calf development and rearing, milk and meat production is essential using competent scientists, and extension staff. Success in one village system would form the model for similar development elsewhere. As part of value added products, production of butter, cheese, ghee should be encouraged and adequate guidance systems and infrastructure developed.

5. *Fisheries and Aquaculture*

Fisheries activities in the coastal marine sector has been badly affected in the last few years. However, this may have allowed fish stocks to build up during this period.

Prawn culture is possible in association with parts of the lagoon systems of the two regions. These regions have to be identified and an overall plan for the development of prawn farming must be formulated. A balance has to be struck between the capital intensive ventures of the large scale developer and the participation of the small scale farmer. However, efficiency of production must not be sacrificed. Plans should include hatchery

development, distribution of post-harvest, extension support for the small producer and an efficient transport and marketing system.

The utilization of seasonal tanks for inland fish production has been referred to earlier. Wherever appropriate tank and channel systems exist these should be used for fish production. Fish will always remain the cheapest source of protein. However, the appropriate species of fish has to be selected for culture and hatcheries set up. The rest of the country has developed inland fisheries around Tilupias which are low quality fish.

6. Industry

In the short term, it is unlikely that industrial ventures can develop and make a major impact on the economy. Agro based ventures which add value to primary products should be the principal focus of development.

The question of whether a glass industry can be developed to produce high quality ornamental and utility goods should be examined as it is believed that there is plenty of sand of high quality that can be exploited.

At some point of time, in the not too distant future, the question of a **Pilot Project on Ocean Thermod Energy Conversion OTEC** based at Trincomalee should be taken up with foreign participation and expertise. Solar power systems, though expensive at

present, should be considered for the future.

7. Tourism

One of the greatest assets of tropical countries is the beauty and the variety of their environment. Properly maintained and rationally exploited a tourist industry can be built around the environmental and cultural heritage of the North and East.

In the pre '83 years the Eastern region attracted a large number of tourists. Tourism should be developed anew in the East, and in the North, using to our best advantage the lessons learnt from the earlier experience. If a proper balance is struck between the needs of the tourist industry and the necessity to preserve a cultural identity and basic values, the harmful effects of tourism can be mitigated.

Strategy for implementation

Rational, planned and rapid development of the economy of the North and the East is the prime responsibility of a provincial administration. A few ideas covering major areas of development have been highlighted in this article. The first step in considering actual planning in any of these or any other areas must be the setting-up of groups of experts, largely local, to carry out indepth studies of potential and patterns of development. Though many of the ideas discussed are, specific to the north and the east, collabora-

tion and cooperation with other provinces and with the central government would be crucial for successful implementation. The present climate is one in which foreign funding agencies would willingly give a helping hand to rebuild the ravaged land if individual projects constituting an integrated plan of development can be built up around ideas such as those generated above, then there is much hope for creating a new and prosperous society out of the ashes of the old.