CLOSING SESSION

CLOSING REMARKS

Michel Petit*

Introduction

Let me begin by thanking all of those who have made this Symposium a great success, especially those from outside the Bank. While the Agricultural Symposium is oriented primarily toward Bank staff, those of you who do not belong to the Bank are nevertheless critical to the success of this activity. I also wish to thank the organizers, namely Jock Anderson, Cees de Haan, Dina Umali, and Pat Bielaski, each of whom has played a discrete and key role in the smooth operation of the proceedings. Finally, I want to thank Surinder Deol and the Training Division in Personnel Management for their collaboration, and express my desire that we continue this fruitful relationship for symposia in the future.

As for my topic, entitled "The World Bank Agricultural Strategy in Relation to Changing Public and Private Roles," I seek your indulgence not only because this is an impossible topic, but because I am likely to repeat things you have heard me say elsewhere, because we tend to return to the question of strategy for the agricultural sector on a regular basis.

The task of addressing strategy is, of course, difficult but necessary and, in fact, timely. The Agriculture and Rural Development Department (AGR), and therefore also the Agricultural Divisions through their input and collaboration, have been asked by the Board to review the sector in a formal paper to be delivered to the Board in September 1992. What the Board is really interested in is where the sector should, or is likely to, be going in the future. Thus, even though it is called a review, it is much more like a discussion on strategy for the sector. The Board is interested in reviewing all of the major sectors at least once every three years, and they want to begin with agriculture. While this could be a difficult exercise, I personally welcome it because in my three-and-one-half years at the Bank, I have never had a chance to discuss with the Board or with senior management issues of a strategic nature which we in this sector are facing.

There are some fairly senior people in this organization who tell me that the agricultural sector is in a state of crisis and that we lack a sense of strategy. The first question to ask is whether there can be a sector strategy for the Bank as a whole. I believe that, while we do need some strategic thinking for the organization overall, nothing will substitute for the need to conceptualize, design, formulate, and implement sector strategies at the country level. It is obvious to me that agricultural strategies are likely to vary tremendously from country to country and from Division to Division.

Let's concentrate on what can be said at the Bank level. On this I would like to address three main points. First I will briefly review what I consider to be the emerging issues, why we need to devise a new strategy. Second I will speak on the elements of an agricultural strategy for development. Third I will give particular attention to the role of governments, a theme of our symposium, and conclude by listing some issues we must resolve regarding the specific role of the Bank in this strategy. I will rely to a large extent on preliminary work that has been done by Peter Hazell.

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* Director of Agriculture and Rural Development Department of the World Bank.

Emerging Issues

After decades of success, the Bank's agricultural lending program is in a troubling state. Its share in total lending has fallen in recent years, and some types of agricultural lending, for instance toward the development of livestock production, have virtually disappeared. This decline was not planned and there is continuing debate as to whether or not it is appropriate. The environment in which agricultural projects are developed, and the implications this environment has for agricultural lending in the future, are clouded by a number of other issues, not the least of which is the steadily increasing failure rate of agricultural projects in recent years. According to the latest Operations Evaluation Department (OED) review, this failure rate stands at 52 percent, in particular among the integrated rural development, the agricultural credit, and the large-scale irrigation projects that have accounted for the bulk of the portfolio.

One problem regarding the environment of agricultural lending is the prevalence of depressed commodity prices on world markets. While we know that projections for the future are very uncertain, the future direction of world commodity prices hinges critically on the uncertain outcome of events such as the Uruguay Round of the GATT negotiations. More important perhaps would be unilateral policy reforms in the European Community, the United States, or Japan, or the liberalization and transformation of agriculture in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. In brief the uncertainty about the outcome of these events is such that current price projections could prove seriously wrong. Still these projections point to prices that are declining or depressed and as long as this is the case, agricultural lending becomes more problematic.

Other factors that will affect the future of agricultural lending include population pressures on natural resources leading to serious degradation of soils, water, and trees in some areas, and the continuing debt and macroeconomic problems, which lead to a sharp curtailment of government expenditures, thereby reducing the financial support available to cover recurrent costs for agricultural institutions and for rural infrastructure.

We can add to these problems the fact that advances in technologies which increase yields have been less dramatic than before. Yield growth has tapered off in Asia, and the International Centers have yet to generate the elements of what could be a second Green Revolution, especially for rainfed farming systems, the prevalent farming systems in most of Sub-Saharan Africa. Finally changes in world climatic conditions, the ozone layer, and biotechnology may begin to have very significant but unpredictable effects on the pattern and scope of agriculture in less-developed countries within the next two to three decades.

Looking ahead two or three decades (a reasonable time frame, considering that this is the lifetime of many recent and currently planned projects), the Bank will be confronted with the difficulty of finding enough good projects to maintain a sizeable agricultural lending program in certain regions. We will be advising on policies and appraising loans under higher levels of uncertainty about future prices, technologies, and climatic conditions than has been the case in the past. And we will have to be increasingly concerned about sustainability issues and environmental costs, more so even than in the past.

Within this context, there should be no doubt that we need a comprehensive strategy for future agricultural lending, one which provides guidance on such issues as the types of agricultural investments and policies that are appropriate for the future, the relative importance that agriculture should receive in the Bank's lending program, and perhaps most difficult, internal Bank changes that are required to ensure improved performance of agricultural projects. This is a tall order.

Elements of an Agricultural Strategy

What are the elements of an agricultural strategy? First we need to reassert that agricultural growth is important, and be quite specific in detailing why this is so. I'm not going to do that here because most of you are staff from the agricultural sector and you don't need to be convinced of the argument. But clearly this is something that needs to be done again. The role of agricultural development in economic growth, employment generation, environmental protection, poverty alleviation, and food security, to name a few, will have to be spelled out. We will also have to explain why it is that, although agriculture declines in relative terms during the structural transformation of economic development, this does not mean that governments should neglect, or worse discriminate against, agriculture.

Second we need to outline the requirements for successful agricultural development. Here I will repeat only very briefly things that I said last year, that is, spell out conditions that have been detailed in our 1990 Annual Sector Review. In that review, we cited only three requirements, while today I will list four. The three previously listed are the development of appropriate technologies, the development of adequate institutions (including those which provide extension services, aid in bringing products to markets, and contribute to the management of natural resources), and the development of adequate economic incentives through the establishment of nondistortionary policies and ready access to domestic and international markets.

Regarding institutions, we know that in any sector the process of development requires human capital formation and social organization, for example, as we have just heard concerning the participatory approach and institutional development promoted by the Aga Khan Foundation in the northern areas of Pakistan. In reality institutional development applies to all four requirements.

The fourth requirement for successful agricultural development I wish to add has to do with the development of rural infrastructure, especially roads, irrigation, schools, health centers, and communications. The reason I add it now is not that we have neglected it in the past but that, given the present organization of the Bank, these subsectors are not completely covered by our sector, but instead are the purview of other departments within Sector and Operations Policy (OSP) and other divisions in the operations complex.

The third element of an agricultural strategy should be defining the role of the government. What lessons have we learned from this symposium? I was quite pleased that we had such a controversial keynote speaker, because he forced us to reflect on several fundamental issues. The discussion which followed Mr. ul Haq's speech on Wednesday was quite interesting and raised important questions. The starting point, I believe, of our reflection on this subject was clearly a disillusionment with government, a clear sense of government failures, and the ensuing debate regarding governance as it relates to Bank operations. I wish to come back to this debate but I wanted to flag this because I believe the link to agriculture is very clear.

How do we agriculturalists view government failure? I hope you will forgive me for returning to the basics for a moment, please allow the old "prof" to lecture just a little! As technicians (and I include economists in this categorization), we tend to be nostalgic for governments, which model the enlightened dictatorship. I'm sure we all believe we have strong democratic values, but we give advice on the basis of our technical expertise and expect the governments to heed that advice. The best model in which this can occur is the enlightened dictatorship. We are in a sense the heirs of the French philosophers of the eighteenth century. Voltaire had a running correspondence with Katherine II of Russia and Frederick the Great of Prussia and among accounts of that correspondence is a quotation that I think expresses the notion of governance very well. Frederick the Great said "the Prince is not the absolute master but only the first servant of his people." That is the kind of government that we would like to have, and we will give advice with confidence, expecting that the dictator, the prince, will be enlightened and, in the interest of the public good, will follow that advice.

Unfortunately, we have learned throughout the ages that not all dictators are enlightened, that their primary objective has not always, or should I say not often, been that of the public good. The fact is that we are struggling with the very difficult issue of the political relationship between public and private interests. As you know, political scientists, and social philosophers before them, have been struggling to find a solution to this problem. Historic progress was made when the United States chose its constitution, not an easy task as they devised one and then rejected it and wrote another. The fascinating progression of these thoughts is documented in the collection of essays known as the Federalist papers.

A look at the United States today, however, gives one the general impression that perhaps we have reached a stalemate between public good and private interest, a stalemate caused, perhaps, by the domination of private interests expressed through lobbying groups that may be too close to the political process for comfort. And these circumstances are not unique to the United States.

It has become apparent that the Marxist solution, that is the dictatorship of the proletariat, also failed to achieve the successes that were expected of it. Although on paper it seemed convincing, its greatest limitation, indeed perhaps ultimately the reason it failed, was the development in the Marxist states of what the Yugoslav writer Djilas called the New Class, what we now refer to as the "nomenklatura."

So today capitalism has primacy. I cannot resist the pleasure of calling your attention to a French author, Michel Albert, who wrote a book called *Capitalists Against Capitalism*. The thesis of the book is that the failure of communism is the victory of capitalism. But there are several forms of capitalism, and Michel Albert believes that we are witness to a struggle between two main forms of capitalism, the one he calls the New American Capitalism, probably embodied in such expressions as Reaganomics and Thatcherism, and the one he calls in French the "Capitalisme Rhenan," which means of the Rhine River, referring to the location of the key city where this brand of capitalism has been elaborated, and where the Socialist Party in Germany decided to abandon socialism some 20 or 30 years ago (at its Congress in Bad Godesberg).

I thought of this comparison as Mahbub ul Haq spoke to us, because the main difference between the two forms of capitalism, according to Michel Albert, is the pursuit of the social objective in Rhine River Capitalism. Pursuit of the social objective, including solidarity among groups within the society, is very different from the emphasis on individualism characterizing the New American model. Both models stress the importance of the market mechanism but propose different solutions for how those markets should be regulated.

What am I leading to? If I return to the pragmatic, I must admit that I don't believe we have a blueprint in either social philosophy or political doctrine that will provide us with answers that are going to be useful to guide World Bank operations. So, in a sense I am disappointed, and sorry to disappoint you, that we have no simple, straightforward guidelines on what should be the proper role of government. We should not be surprised, therefore, that neither could the debate within the Bank answer this question. The Bank has very specific articles of agreement, based on the notion that one can separate politics from economics. This is, of course, a very difficult distinction to make, as we have learned from our own discussions the past few days.

I would suggest that we must base operations, the projects we undertake, the policy guidelines and recommendations we choose to make, on the concept of market failures and not government failures. In doing so, however, we must recognize that our attempts and government's attempts to correct those market failures may, in fact, lead to government failures. We certainly do not believe, and should not be led to believe, that governments are all powerful and are going to be able to correct all market failures. Nevertheless, to guide our actions, I believe the principle of addressing market failures to be the most productive one. Let me briefly review what I believe to be the three types of market failures.

Market Failures

Markets won't work well, and will not bring about the public good, if monopoly power is unregulated. The concept of monopoly power doesn't have much currency at the moment, but it continues to be a very important one, especially in rural areas. The other two concepts that are well known and receive more attention right now are those of externalities and the existence of public goods. The importance of externalities lies in the fact that often private costs and benefits will differ from social costs and benefits. These externalities arise from the possibility that the aggregate of individual decisions may not bring about the social, or public, good. We have seen this to be the case in many environmental issues. The existence of public goods, which cannot or should not be appropriated, lends itself to the argument that there is less than the socially optimum quantity of public goods being produced.

Those of you who were in the session on veterinary services will recall this argument in the discussion of the various kinds of veterinary services required and, in attempting to distinguish between those services that are best suited to private sector development, and those that should perhaps be provided by the government, or at least supervised or regulated closely by the government. You will also recall that there was a very interesting discussion allowing that, while the concept of distinguishing among types of services is appropriate, its practical application is delicate.

We also have had discussion regarding regulations as public goods in research and extension, and the possibility and implications of increased involvement of the private sector in these activities. In doing so, we are beginning to define more carefully just which activities are indeed public goods and which are not. Frankly when I listened to the discussion on the English and Welsh extension services, I wondered whether there is a risk of losing a public good. I later talked with Paul Ingram, and he suggested that by choosing to put advisers in remote areas where they are not likely to be compensated by the farmers, government may be seeking to satisfy the social optimum by providing more advisers for marginal farming.

I do not want to suggest that we have a simple recipe here. However, I believe that this point illustrates that the notion of public goods is worthwhile but that great intelligence will be required in deciding when and when not to provide them through government activity. We should be comforted by that conclusion, because if this could be done mechanically and did not require intelligence, the Bank would not need us! The solution, I believe, is to weigh the potential government failures against the existing or potential market failures.

Here, in this exercise of judgement, I would recall Mahbub ul Haq's conclusion, that we must beware of ideology. I disagree with Michael Cernea's assertion in the discussion that followed that, when you advocate the alleviation of poverty it is simply another ideology, not an ideal. There is a difference between an ideal and an ideology. An ideology is a system of thinking that presumes to give you solutions to practical problems and a way of organizing your ideas. This is what we must be wary of in our line of work.

Let me submit a very practical illustration of what I am talking about. I am absolutely convinced that there is a role for government involvement in agricultural credit. The presentation we by Jacob Yaron and Gershon Feder could be read in various ways, but Jacob's message clearly stated that, in some instances, government intervention is appropriate for the proper targeting of agricultural credit. It is also clear that, in many instances, these principles have been abused, but this is not sufficient cause to do away with them, only to exercise caution in their application.

I submit that our discussion this morning on the role of the Aga Khan Foundation suggests that we should look at farmers' organizations, cooperatives and other similar organizations more closely. There is clearly a public good which is performed by the Aga Khan Foundation in the northern areas of Pakistan, and which could be performed by governments and bureaucrats. What type of governments is another question, but we cannot abandon hope for government participation just because we have experienced so many failures in the past.

The Role of the World Bank

Let me come to my third and final point, that is, what are the consequences for the World Bank and its activities? I believe that the classification of Bank activities into three categories (those that enhance appropriate technologies, institutional development, and the management of natural resources) can be useful. Like all classifications, it has its limitations, for instance we are not going to be able to properly manage natural resources without simultaneously promoting new practices that may well require technological changes, and policy changes that provide incentives to those who must make the change.

We need to continue applying pressure for policy reforms because we have found that even when reforms are imposed, for instance in the case of structural adjustment loans, agriculture is too often left out of the equation, and in one way or another discrimination against agriculture continues. We also must be vigilant concerning natural resource management, as many of you who have been involved in the preparation of the Forest Policy Paper will appreciate (the completion of an Operational Directive on this sector is imminent, and I hope we can develop a smoother process of reconciling differences among interested parties on similar issues in the future). As you know, we have begun preparing a Water Resource Management Policy Paper. We also need to continue financing irrigation and drainage, an issue that we address in the 1991 Annual Agricultural Sector Review. Finally we must pursue in depth the issues of land and soil resources.

We need, perhaps with even more vigor than in the past, to promote technological change. As you know we are in the process of reassessing the relationship between the Bank and the international agricultural research centers (of the CGIAR), and while we have no intention of abandoning the CGIAR, there are serious issues surrounding these centers, which deserve our full attention. We will continue to support agricultural research in borrowing countries, a task not without its problems but one worthy of our attention, for example as we are giving to African national research through the Bank's continuing support of the Special Program for African Agricultural Research (SPAAR). The discussion on biotechnology demonstrated the importance of this activity and the high stakes involved, and the Bank will continue to include support of this activity in its agricultural strategy.

While I am glad to hear continued debate regarding extension and training and visitation (T&V), unfortunately this debate has taken on somewhat of an ideological character. I hope the presentations and discussion over the past few days have contributed somewhat toward a resolution of the issues. It would seem that everybody agrees that there is a need for extension agents who will visit farmers, and that those extension agents have to be trained. What should be done and how it should be done, however, is still up for consideration. It is certain, whatever our opinions, that the Africa Region, which uses T&V as its model, has experienced diverse results from its application, some of which are very positive. The controversy, which continues to surround these issues, however, has to do not only with the effectiveness of what is being done, but with the bigger question concerning the role of the private versus the public sectors.

Let me conclude with what perhaps is the most delicate factor in defining the Bank's role in agricultural development. In my notes from the proceedings of the past few days, I have points on regional variation and country specificity. In defining a strategy for the Bank as a whole, I do not mean to imply that it would be unnecessary to define a strategy at the country level. Indeed it is probably more important to do so at the country level than at the Bank level.

But this brings us to matters of internal procedures. We will need to improve our capacity to do interdisciplinary and intersectoral work. I hope that others would agree that the Agriculture and Rural Development Department has made some progress in this direction. The so-called NEXUS work in the Africa Region is similarly attempting to address the intersectoral issues. Yet in spite of these successes, I must say I underestimated the magnitude of this challenge when I joined the Bank. Clearly this is an area where further good and workable ideas will be welcome.

A more controversial subject perhaps has to do with whether or not agricultural lending by the Bank warrants spending more staff resources in the sector. There are some compelling arguments that say concentrating on the quality of programming is more important than the volume of lending to agriculture. Indeed in some instances we contribute more to development with less money and more intelligence. But the Bank prides itself on increasing significantly its volume of lending to special sectors or "areas of emphasis," and by doing so, the volume of lending has something to do with the amount of staff resources that go into related activities. Should we try to break that link? I'll leave that question for you, in your collective wisdom, to mull over. I ask you, however, to please let us know what you are thinking on this and other subjects, because AGR will most certainly need to take a position on behalf of the agricultural sector in the Bank.

Finally and also having to do with internal matters, there is the question of the management of our sectoral expertise. This relates particularly to our technical experts, and the set of skills we are able to offer to our borrowers through every aspect of lending operations and OSP support to operations. If we believe that something has to be done to properly manage these skills, and there seems to be strong agreement this is needed, then we may have to change our recruitment procedures. This is a most controversial topic and I know that there is no consensus in this room as to what, if anything, should be done about it.

Proper management also means that we will have to pay more attention to training existing staff, and on this we may have a consensus. As you know, we have an agricultural sector training group, and we are looking at this issue forthrightly and with what we hope is the entire spectrum of opinion represented. One of the tasks of managing our sectoral staff has to do with career profiles and development. Managers of the Bank cannot and must not ignore the most recent staff survey results, which showed that this was an area of discontent.

Let me conclude by saying that in this, as in anything and everything else that we do, we will only be able to make progress if we work together. We are in exactly the same position as the farmers of northern Pakistan, and need to be organized no less than they. I hope that AGR can be instrumental in helping us meet our sectoral objectives, and in representing the public good both inside and outside the Bank. Let us all work collectively to ensure that we are heading in the right direction.

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