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Book Reviews


This book is divided into two sections: the first on various aspects of socialism in general; the second as applied to education and development. Throughout, the authors have Africa and especially Zimbabwe very much in mind. It does not go into many questions in depth, but raises a vast number of very important issues for developing countries.

Some pains are taken to allay the anxieties of those who fear the wholesale nationalisation of all institutions, or the blind application of socialist principles, or the confiscation of land, houses, wives, husbands and even chickens. Socialism does not mean state control, or excessive bureaucratic control or totalitarianism, but the scientific analysis of objective social reality.

At the same time the authors point out the failures of African Socialism in Tanzania. In Libya, Morocco, Senegal and Sudan what is called socialism is in reality feudalistic, reactionary and oppressive, while other leaders are racist in their appeal to tribal instincts. Zimbabwe is fortunate in coming to independence late through an armed struggle, so that her leaders have seen the problems of other countries and have evolved beyond an ideology of mere nationalism.

The detrimental effects of colonialism are pointed out, particularly lingering mental colonisation. Under neo-colonialism Western nations can overthrow governments, but unfortunately the authors do not have the courage also to criticise Soviet Union interference in less powerful states. There is a good analysis of the activities of multinationals, trade between developing and developed nations, the International Monetary Fund and NGOs. However I am not convinced that tourism is a major cause of the prostitution problem except in Swaziland and Bophuthatswana. It is essential that developing countries co-ordinate themselves into a stronger body to control these neocolonialist activities. But is is noted that it is unwise to ignore reality for the sake of ideological purity; there is a need to make alliances; for example, are there sufficient local management skills and investment available for nationalisation? Surprisingly no reference is made to the way multinationals make friends even in socialist governments by means of gifts and donations. With the
present question of sanctions against South Africa it is interesting to read that Zimbabwe benefitted from the days of economic sanctions in that it developed local self-sufficiency and limited the growth of multinational power.

The opening chapter is a very well presented brief account of socialism. The important distinction is made between scientific socialism and utopian socialism. Zimbabwe has very clearly chosen scientific socialism. Chapter two contains a class analysis of Zimbabwe. The authors are aware of the claim that Marxist class analysis is not applicable to Africa, but this claim is dismissed in a single, short paragraph. However, with so many exceptions to classical Marxist class analysis having to be made, some more thought might be given to finding a more appropriate class analysis for Africa.

The idea of Socialist education is outlined, based on Marx’s idea of a polytechnic education. On purely development criteria the educational level of the majority must be raised to provide high quality education for a large majority at a reasonable price, which means fee-paying day schools. This book rejects rote learning. The need is to learn to control and change the natural environment and society. But although students are to be taught to think critically one wonders how critically they are to think about socialism or the government?

The advance of science and technology is especially important for Africa in changing from superstitious and fatalistic attitudes. This along with the arts and research are all to be related to the social reality of the nation, serve the needs of the nation and not be estranged from the mass of the people. Interestingly theology is mentioned but there is no reference to theological research leading to an African liberation theology. The authors propose academic freedom, freedom of expression and constructive criticism, but with ideological guidance provided from the Party: a very fragile balance which begs a lot of questions. All students must have a sound grasp of Marxism-Leninism, but what if they find they prefer capitalism?

While the educational system in Korea is impressive in many ways, some readers may feel nervous at the thought of Africa also following the personality cult of the Dear Leader Kim Jong II. And particularly surprising are the examples of the pyramids of Egypt and grand buildings of Ancient Rome and modern New York to illustrate the dignity of labour, unless we are to reinstitute slavery or change our minds about the multinationals.

There is a brief chapter on education with production which started in the Zimbabwean refugee camps during the liberation war. This chapter could have
been expanded to give a fuller account since the Zimbabwean experience which has been relatively successful would be of interest to many outside the country.

There is a very good review of what elements make up the culture of a nation, including the negative effects of colonialisation on the culture of Zimbabwe, and a critical analysis of some of the negative aspects of traditional Zimbabwean culture. This is followed by a call to develop a new culture, taking suitable elements from Western culture as well as from indigenous African culture.

On development; it is the people who develop. So it does not mean the construction of prestige projects, but the elimination of poverty, disease and ignorance, for which the increase in national wealth is essential. We are not to confuse the welfare state with socialism; socialism does not necessarily mean free education and health services. There must be a planned economy, but planned with the participation of all those who will be taking part in the programme and all those who will be affected by the programme, to be achieved through democratic centralism. Parents committees are praised for raising funds for building, but how much say are these parents to have in the education of their children?

This short, well written book would be very useful as a basis for group discussions, for teaching, as well as an introduction for anyone involved in education or development in third world countries.

Reviewed by Nigel Johnson, St Pauls Mission, Harare.


If you can spell the term ‘development’ it implies that you are literate and if you are literate then it implies that you are capable of contributing meaningfully to the development process. This apparently sums up the ‘silent’ hypothesis held by the two researchers Margareta and Rolf Sjöström when they set out on the study which culminated in the present book. One might also add that this statement also appears to be a fair reflection of the view that has prevailed in Ethiopian society where it has been more or less taken for granted that literacy is a necessary prerequisite for the development of the rural areas of the country. People needed literacy skills, it was agreed, in order to comprehend information about agricultural techniques, health, etc.
The book 'How do you spell development' is yet another welcome addition to the fast growing body of literature on the theme of literacy training. It was published in 1983 and is based on a study of the Yemissrach Dimits Literacy Campaign (YDLC) in 12 Ethiopian regions. The campaign was started in 1962 but the study was only carried out between 1974 and 1976. Its theme was 'role of literacy for development', and it was done under the auspices of the Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus. At the time of the study, Ethiopia was one of many developing countries which had a very low literacy rate. The study was essentially an evaluation of the literacy campaign with the major aim being to describe and analyse campaign activities, taking into cognisance such important variables as teaching processes and student achievement. However, it must be pointed out that the study did not limit itself to the main assignment since "the researchers were also interested in studying effects other than student achievement" (p. 181). In the study, literacy was defined as an agent for development both in economic and humanistic terms.

The book is in four parts (although due to typographical errors, the 'contents' section indicates otherwise). Part one is basically a theoretical look at such pertinent concepts as development, literacy and education. This part further gives a brief overview of the political and social history of Ethiopia. In this vein, the authors give a brief account of the Ethiopian revolution, its causes, conduct and consequences. They argue that during the Selassie era the aim of development effort had not really been to raise the living standards of the poor, there had been too much emphasis on the export market. They then conclude that the political upheavals of 1974 were a direct consequence of non-participation by peasants in the economy.

The question of education in Ethiopia is also looked at in some detail, again from a historical perspective. It is apparent from the account given that Ethiopian education was very much influenced by traditional values. To give credence to this observation, the authors quote Levine (1972) lamenting that "Amhara formal education in no sense seeks to cultivate the individual but solely to prepare cultural specialists who will be able to perform the rituals and perpetuate the teaching of the Ethiopian Church" (p. 33).

The authors capably paint a picture — albeit a bleak one — of how education was elitist in nature and how the majority of the population were denied education, particularly during the Selassie regime. They then contrast this with the more positive approach of the post-revolution era where the new government is shown as having gone out of its way to rectify the situation. They quote a 1979 proclamation by the new regime which stated that "For socialist thinking to thrive, for production and research to develop and for
theory and practice to be matched, the essential condition will be created only when education is related to the daily life of the masses” (p. 40).

The historical account is both useful and welcome if only to try and put the study into perspective. However, with no less than 40 pages devoted to preliminaries which includes a large portion of the historical account, many readers might be forgiven for thinking that they had mistakenly picked up a history textbook. The motive might have been to provide the reader with an adequate background to the Ethiopian situation but my feeling is that it is unnecessarily long.

Parts II, III and IV of the book concern themselves with issues pertaining to the study proper, its findings and the authors views and comments on the various issues unearthed through the investigation. As mentioned elsewhere the YDLC study was of an evaluative nature.

The campaign was initiated in 1962 and by 1975 more than half a million people had participated in the programme. The target group was said to be the 15 – 25 age group. An evaluative study particularly in literacy is always difficult to do, but the evaluative method adopted for this particular study was based on behavioural objectives and decision making, and the researchers were at least aware of the need to be systematic and objective. The evaluation design had three principal elements, namely frames (which are defined as factors which constrain the instructional process going on at a school), processes (which constitute the actual manner of literacy instruction in the campaign) and outcomes (ie achievement in literacy and relevance of skills acquired). The basic purpose of the study was stated as being to show the relationship between outcomes and goals.

The study consisted of three sub-studies, namely literacy achievement study, observation study and interviewing. One of the central concerns of the researchers was to establish whether literacy as a skill had been instrumental in developing the village and whether literacy brought any tangible benefits to the neo-literates. With regard to this pertinent question it is disturbing that the students stated that they had not experienced substantial benefit from the newly acquired literacy skills. This can only mean there was a discrepancy between the goals of the sponsors and the benefit expected by the learners.

Yet another conclusion reached by the researchers was that it took up to two years for a student to become literate. Unfortunately the all-important question of literacy retention was not fully addressed in the study. Considering that the study was carried out over a period of three years, it would have been
interesting to find out how long students managed to retain the imparted skills, on average. Relapse to illiteracy is a major topic in the field of literacy training and it is my feeling that, since this was an evaluative study, it would have been appropriate to look at this. Maybe the researchers felt that the topic was too large and would require a whole book of its own.

From the interviews, a picture of the role of traditional attitudes emerges, and for those interested in the volatile issue of women’s rights the study did look at how the campaign catered for the needs of rural women.

Interestingly, however, 77% of all students who participated in the campaign were male. This is very curious, particularly since in many countries it has been found that it is the men who shun literacy training. It is difficult to imagine how so many men were attracted to the campaign, especially when in the end a lot of the participants said the exercise had been futile and fruitless.

As mentioned elsewhere, the researchers did not confine themselves to the main assignment which was to evaluate the YDLC in Ethiopia, they looked at other effects of the programme as well. Many readers might be aware of the many intricacies which are associated with doing field research in a foreign country, but it may still be worthwhile to review a few which were experienced in the present study. These serve as valuable lessons.

One important lesson from the study is to do with the whole question of the application of Western models to third world situations, particularly the problems of bias and ethnocentrism. There were other problems which, although seemingly specific to Ethiopia, could be important in other countries as well. For instance, besides the volatile political climate that prevailed in Ethiopia at the time of the study, (notably due to the deposing of the Emperor), there were other problems such as the rigorous formalities required for entry into certain areas, shortage of schools in which to carry out the study and lack of competence in local languages (which had obvious detrimental effects), to name but a few major ones.

Perhaps the most important lesson, particularly for foreign researchers, to emerge from this study was the need to do reconnaissance work before sitting down to plan statistical strategies. The authors point out on the question of evaluation that the study had forced them to review their thinking on the subject and that they now “share the opinion that it is high time for evaluators to start approaching their task from the development mode reflected in a certain programme rather than to base their approach on hand books which generally
reflect a functionalist outlook" (p. 186). Thus critical discussion about what are to be considered the main goals for development, argue the authors, is a necessary element of such an evaluation exercise.

The book, while fairly comprehensively compiled, does fall short in certain critical respects. For example the authors' insatiable quest to provide the minutest of details on various topics is questionable. In discussing the study findings, the researchers go into too much theoretical discussion of concepts before presenting the actual study data. In my opinion this is uncalled for and is a weakness evident throughout the book. Another issue on which I take the authors to task is in connection with the question of samples and sampling. The sample of 149 individuals used for the interview section of the study appears to have been too small considering the magnitude of the study. Also, the fact that sampling was not random but haphazard robbed the study of some of its glamour and it follows that the results of the study have to be treated with due caution.

Having said that, I must be quick to add that the greatest attribute of a true academic is having the audacity and presence of mind to acknowledge weaknesses and shortcomings in his or her work and this the authors have unashamedly done. For example, they concede in one part, “We are aware of the risk that we have misinterpreted our interview data since, as foreigners, we are influenced by a Western culture and Western notions” (p. 158). All the same, one important attribute of this book is that it does utilise diagrams, sketches and makes extensive use of tables and other illustrations. While I have some misgivings concerning some aspects of the detail to do with methodology (e.g. lack of scientific sampling), I still feel this book is valuable not only to those engaged in research work at home or in foreign countries but also to those engaged in literacy work in particular and in development work in general, particularly in the developing world.


The title of this book may deter ordinary development workers from reading it because it may be thought that it pertains only to Oxfam workers. On the
contrary, the Field Directors Handbook has been carefully compiled using experience gained in development work worldwide.

The handbook contains a variety of topics covering major development issues. For easy reading the book is set out in eight parts, each one dealing with specific issues. The introductory Part I deals with issues relevant to all development programmes. It is explicit about what the role of non-governmental organisations in field operations should be. An NGO is not expected “to create structures parallel to those of the state, nor to act as a substitute in the provision of services which are recognised as a state responsibility”. Instead NGOs should concentrate on working with groups that are ignored or by-passed by the State, both in the urban and rural areas. This would be an important lesson for development workers in Zimbabwe where NGOs have mushroomed and are all vying to be the ones giving support to the various communities.

Parts 2 and 3 are a must for all development workers. These two parts cover an area that is often totally ignored by people operating in the field – the historical and socio-economic circumstances in which the development programme is located. The Handbook emphasises the importance of local community participation, both in the planning and implementation of the development programmes. The present emphasis is on choosing small scale, less expensive options implemented by the communities themselves. It is at this level that NGOs can intervene without necessarily getting involved in global politics. Development plans should no longer be designed by armchair directors in foreign capitals where the organisations originate.

Part 4 deals with issues relating to social development programmes which aim at increasing participation, strengthening community organisation, reducing dependence, and heightening critical awareness. NGOs here should be involved in the social education of the groups they are assisting. Training programmes should include imparting vocational skills, life skills, literacy skills and communication skills. The section on agriculture offers very interesting reading as it deals with the aims of agricultural projects which are to help people become self-sufficient in food production. It also deals with topics related to conservation, forestry and extension. All these are issues affecting food production in the Third World.

The section on health deals with health intervention which, the handbook says, must be flexible and adaptable to the local socio-economic and geographical circumstances. Health must be seen to be an integral part of the overall development process and therefore emphasis should be preventive
rather than curative. Oxfam, like other NGOs, sees its role as being the delivery of primary health care to the whole community and this includes programmes in nutrition, immunisation, sanitation and water, mother and child health, training and simple curative services and first aid. The section deals further with specific common diseases and I find this very useful basic information for fieldworkers who are without medical training.

The Third World, particularly Africa and Asia, is prone to both natural and unnatural disasters for a number of reasons. However, in most cases it is the poorest members of the community who suffer most from this disruption of peoples’ lives. Part 8 provides quite interesting guidelines for disaster assistance and indicates the various Oxfam procedures. It also gives a list of agencies involved in disaster relief and briefly states how each operates. Further on the section deals with various disaster responses which include all aspects dealt with in the book. These responses include the making of assessments by the field staff of needs related to health and nutrition, physical infrastructure and administration.

It must be noted that Oxfam is doing good work throughout the world and the compilation of this handbook is a masterpiece. It should not go unnoticed, however, that Oxfam has not discovered a magical formula, other NGOs are using the same methodology. However, I find it useful to combine Oxfam’s experiences with those of other NGOs as the handbook has provided flexible and indeed broad guidelines to practical development issues.

The book avoids, while not denying the importance of theoretical studies, jargon and complex theoretical concepts. This is due to the diversity and the number of countries in which Oxfam operates. This is also a blessing in disguise for other development workers not necessarily working for Oxfam and this is where the handbook is particularly useful. Also for further reading, the book offers a resources section which indicates books, journals and institutions where information can be obtained.

The address list in the last section is very practical indeed. It gives Oxfam Field officers addresses by continent together with their telephone numbers. Also a list of international Development Agencies is given together with their addresses. This book is a must for both development agencies and development workers.

The only criticism one may point out is that the issues raised are rather arbitrary. Again the same points are repeated over and over throughout the
eight sections of the book. One finds solace in that the editors were aware of this and have tried to overcome it, in some sections, by cross referencing topics covering the same points.

In summary therefore Parts I, II and III should be consulted by all concerned with development work. For practitioners involved in specific issues consultation should be made of the other parts dealing with their area of concern. These parts are concerned with social and economic development, health, agriculture and disasters. Here one finds very interesting detailed treatment of specific programmes with examples experienced in the field. For example, on energy sources and use mention is made of strides made in India and China in biomass production, etc.

I recommend this book as a must for all development workers in the Third World: for Zimbabwean workers Oxfam’s experience in the handbook will be invaluable given the developmental problems the country is currently facing. I see this book going a long way in assisting development workers in the Third World. It could also be used in schools that are teaching development as a subject.


About Understanding – ideas and observations on cross-cultural communication, Andreas Fugelsang, Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, Uppsala, Sweden, 1982, 231 pgs, US$12,00.

A major aim of this interesting book is to increase our understanding of cross-cultural communication, and especially its relations to language and media technology. Fugelsang introduces the task by contrasting modern western logical thought with third world thinking patterns. He abhors the notion that those who use traditional modes of thought are “illiterate, irrational and prelogical”, proposing that such misconceptions are due to an ethnocentric language trap. In other words, when western scientists analyse the so-called ‘tribal cultures’, they do so through culturally biased eyes, obviating perception of wholeness, unity and order. Fugelsang’s main argument here is a restatement of the Whorf-Sapir principle of linguistic relativity that perception of reality is a function of the language used, which differs from culture to culture. If cross-cultural communication is to occur, mutual understanding is necessary. Unless observers have a similar linguistic background, perceptions of reality will differ.
Psychologists have examined this proposition extensively. They conclude that there is little to justify the claim that language differences determine or restrict thought in the direct way that Whorf claimed (Dodd and White, 1980: 291). Nevertheless, there seems substance in Fugelsang's propositions, provided we extend 'language' to incorporate other communication modes, including media, gestures and signs - as indeed did the linguistic philosopher Wittgenstein – together with the attitudes, beliefs and judgements that colour all forms of communication.

Fugelsang admits these qualifications in his discussion of the need to 'demystify our words', his argument devolves on a set of Western 'myths', including 'the logical universe', 'the world of pure reason', 'the essential goodness of modern technology', 'the validity of the consumer society as a model for national development,' 'the beauty of the educated mind' and 'the poverty of illiteracy'. All this is fair enough, as is his assertion that third world social practitioners should become aware of their unwitting acceptance of these myths, so that their efforts towards social transformation might become more meaningful.

Reasonable too is his claim that we do not fully understand the ongoing process of social transformation, nor do we know how to process the information that is involved. But here we come to a case of the 'byter bit'. In his ensuing discussion of information theory entitled "The Opposite of Uncertainty", Fugelsang is paradoxically forced into the tricky terrain of abstract logic, with the result that some sections may not be easily understood by the readers to whom the book is addressed. Be this as it may, the gist of this chapter is that social transformation is best approached through programming. The word 'programme' is used to refer to the planning of a series of actions in a certain order which, in fact, serves to forecast future events in reality. Fugelsang maintains that everyone uses programmes, giving as examples: the Bemba farmer, whose programme for agriculture is shaped by tradition and personal experience to provide the biggest yield; the Copenhagen delicatessen owner, whose recorded accounts ensure higher efficiency and greater profits; the Tollai wild pig trapper in New Guinea, who knows how and where to set his traps for maximal entrapment; and the NASA space exploration programme, whereby information about the solar system is revealed (interestingly he does not add the capitalistic spinoff which also accrues). In each example, Fugelsang claims, information is processed in the same way, by describing sequences of action in reality aimed at reducing uncertainty. The important consideration here, he argues, is that such programmes are recorded in different languages which can lead to cross-cultural communication.
problems, the subject of his next chapter. Before considering this I should note my reservations regarding Fugelsang’s assertions about programme-determined actions.

Literary speaking, a programme means ‘something written before’. In Fugelsang’s usage this is obviously not the case, since neither the Bemba nor the Tollai use writing. Admittedly, the advent of modern computerisation broadened the meaning of ‘programme’, so that now perhaps it is legitimate to use it to describe any action-plan, whether formulated or not. Nevertheless it seems relevant to refer to a distinction drawn by the reviewer some 20 years ago between the action systems of traditional and modern societies (Mundy-Castle, 1968; see also 1984). The crux of that argument is that programmation characterises modern societies and serves to delimit freedom of action, since it creates the illusion of a future that is already ‘there’.

Such delusory certainty guides programme-determined man into the easy life of pre-ordained security, provided the programme fits life’s exigencies and denies him his capacity for spontaneous, ad hoc determination of behaviour. The latter characterises traditional societies, whose ‘programmes’ (to use Fugelsang’s term) are not explicitly formulated and in consequence are far more adaptable and versatile than those that are written.

In his examination of the problems of language and cross-cultural communication, Fugelsang focuses on cultural differences between third and modern worlds in fundamental concepts like space, time, measurement, objectivity, subjectivity, the spirit world and cosmology. He makes the important point that culture is the language in which people structure their experience so that they may share knowledge with each other. He recognises the need for further classification of conceptual differences that arise between oral and written language users, and launches into a fascinating historical account of the history of writing. To this he adds a section questioning the cross-cultural validity of Piagetian conservation procedures for cognitive development assessment, stating that Piaget’s theory may not be applicable in Africa.

Important here is that assessment of conservation acquisition depends on meaningful testing, which requires the grasping of children’s intentions. Conventional Piagetian procedures often fail in this condition, so that conservation is not elicited, whereas if intentions are grasped, conservation is observed. The problem for the cross-cultural psychologist is to break the meaning barrier, and this requires study of nonwestern communication modes.
Fugelsang considers this problem in his chapter on words and concepts, in which he argues that traditional thought is not fundamentally different from modern scientific thought. This proposition is not new (e.g. Horton, 1967; Gay and Cole, 1967). The important question raised concerns the influence of writing on cognition and communication, and the work of Levi-Strauss (1966) and Goody (1971) suggests it has a powerful effect. As Goody observes, literacy encourages special forms of linguistic activity associated with special kinds of problem raising and solution, in which lists, formulae and tables play a prominent part. Fugelsang makes no reference to these works, yet they are relevant to his thesis.

Chapter 7 is concerned with the logic of spirits, a theme on which the reviewer has also written (Mundy-Castle, 1984). I am not quite sure that I agree with Fugelsang’s conclusions that memory pictures and eidetic imagery are sufficient explanation for the ‘existence’ of spirits, and that seeing a spirit is the same as seeing a mental image. Nor am I happy with his denigration of the idea that magic is irrational. Perhaps I am the victim of a language trap, but I still have a great respect for irrationality, and, for that matter, magic and witchcraft. When Fugelsang argues that magic is simply a rational attempt by people to control their reality, I am tempted to conclude it is he who is caught in a logic trap.

In the remaining chapters, Fugelsang develops his ideas on cultural life in traditional villages, notably in Papua New Guinea and various parts of Africa. As with the rest of the book, these make interesting and provocative reading, and the whole work is profusely illustrated, with well-chosen photographs, pictures, tables and diagrams. There is a useful chapter on visual perception and its relation to pictorial and other forms of visual communication, and an excellent chapter on the promise and problems of community health in the village.

I hope that this review conveys my admiration for this excellent book. It is a must for anyone engaged in cross-cultural education, primary health care and nutrition, and would make useful reading for most psychologists, sociologists and social workers, especially those engaged in Third World endeavours.

Reviewed by Alastair Mundy-Castle, University of Zimbabwe, Harare.

References

The two books for review present very different UN perspectives from which to tackle the important question of how to understand and conceptualise development. McGranahan’s book is a very technical work published by the UN Research Institute for Social Development, precisely subtitled “An enquiry into international indicators of development and quantitative inter-relations of social and economic components of development”. Miles’ book, though physically much smaller, has a much wider interest, for the author seeks to elaborate on how social indicators “can be used in attempts to assess and improve the human condition” (p. 1), and is a report presented to the UN University under the auspices of its Goals, Process and Indicators of Development (GPID) Project (see Journal, Vol 1, No 1, article by Valashakis and Martin).

McGranahan’s book is not easy reading. Some 171 pages of figures, and graphs are consigned to annexes, while the text itself presents arguments for combining a number of quantitative cross-national statistics to form indicators for relative development. Correlation and regression, as commonly understood, are rejected as methods of statistical analysis in favour of what is called a ‘correspondence system of analysis’, a form of regression analysis that does not choose between dependent and independent variables. Some 19 key indicators are selected (e.g. expectation of life at birth, per cent adult male labour in agriculture, per capita energy and steel consumption, combined primary and secondary school enrolment) and charted on a ‘development
profile for each country. The work highlights the serious problems inherent in cross-national data comparisons, the paucity of quality data on social development, and the conceptual problem of using aggregated data to represent countries as the unit measurement and observation. The analysis can only use data for 77 countries, and from these countries only 11 indicators are deemed worthwhile (alongside GDP per capita), but conclusions like the fact that “the fastest growing countries in GDP per capita 1970 – 1980 generally had higher education levels in 1970 than their average development level” (p. 270) are interesting, but hardly surprising. Although McGranahan rejects the idea of a single index of socio-economic development he and his authors end by presenting, “for what it may be worth”, they say, a table listing countries by five different methods of deriving a general index. One happy result for the study is that the correlations among four methods (all involving indicators used throughout the study) were fairly high, but there were large differences with the fifth index calculated as GDP per capita.

Miles’ historical and descriptive work would certainly agree with McGranahan on the inadequacy of GDP type indicators, but his study tantalisingly points to other areas where measurement is necessary to understand human development, yet under present scientific methods cannot be done. The work outlines the social indicator movement’s critique of GNP statistics, suggests new areas to be included in human development, looks at the limitations of present national statistics, and explores two new approaches to useful social indicator systems, that of social accounting and the social report. Although the work is descriptive (and none the less useful for that, for its 300 plus references are valuable in themselves) it occasionally is able to go beyond the mere collation of earlier studies: the best example is in the author’s discussion of the ‘social report’ in Chapter 6. Here he links social indicators to a discussion of the process of liberation in Africa. Measurement of national autonomy and disengagement from the world economy, of democratisation of the process of production, and productivity growth are necessary but not sufficient conditions for human development in Africa, the author argues, for environmental and reproduction relations have also to be considered. Miles concludes his study with a valuable plea for demystification so that democratic choice can inform issues of social and human concern.

A synoptic perspective on the two books shows how the field of social indicators of social and human development is still in its infancy: one study demonstrates the shortcomings of cross-national comparisons of official data, while the other shows how the many issues involved in human development cannot be captured by present methodologies. Of the two, Miles is more accessible to the general reader, with a wider perspective, but McGranahan’s
is useful in involving the reader in the difficulties of those who work in the field.

Reviewed by Joe Hampson, School of Social Work, Harare


This volume is the proceedings of a workshop organised by the United Nations Environment Programme and the International Society for Ecological Modelling. As such, the ten country case papers presented reflect the stage of progress in the countries concerned, progress which is bound to be uneven. The difference in their approaches to development range from one which reduces the recipient population to the status of passive consumers of carefully controlled amounts of a specified form of energy (Senegal) to the engagingly 'suck it and see' approach of an Indian experimental/demonstration village.

Two of the studies describe well developed purpose-built village systems which integrate several renewable energy sources; the well-known Xinbu energy village in south China and UNEP project in Sri Lanka. The purpose of the workshop may well have been to review the applicability and progress of the 'Xinbu model', but the emphasis seems to have moved from 'integrated rural energy systems' to 'integrated planning of rural energy systems' and this shift will make the findings of the workshop more useful.

Three case reports deal with what are primarily desk exercises in national planning (in Colombia, Nigeria and Indonesia), while a couple more focus on the village use of one particular technology. I found those which reported on the integration of more than one renewable energy technology into an existing community or region the most interesting, and the paper on Dodoma region, Tanzania, sounds chords which will strike echoes throughout the savanna and semiarid regions of sub-Saharan Africa.

The 'Xinbu model' may only be possible with the degree of community organisation and the low income differentials of China. The Sri Lanka case study suggests that, apart from the cost of the resident expert staff, the capital expense involved in installing equipment for some of the technologies concerned can only be recovered in regions as densely populated as south Asia, and outside these regions this equipment could hardly be adequately maintained. This applies to all but the simplest solar photovoltaic systems and possibly to the community use of a network of biogas digesters.
Few of these papers address the broader reasons for promoting the use of renewable sources of energy, and the Sri Lanka study, which does so in most detail, pursues an argument which risks slowing the drive to develop these sources. This argument emphasises the high price of petroleum products, which applied from 1979 until about the date of this workshop, but the reason for switching to renewable sources should surely not be that oil prices will continue to rise, but that oil is effectively a nonrenewable resource and must be replaced eventually. Letting short-term economic considerations, like the recent drop in world oil prices, govern the rate of development of alternative sources is to risk being unprepared when there finally is no choice but to turn to renewables.

The final chapter of this volume, guidelines for planning, is timely and even were it for this chapter alone the book should find a place on the shelves of the growing number of people who are focusing on this area.

Reviewed by Brian MacGarry, Silveira House, Harare, Zimbabwe.