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## On Organising Equity: Are Solutions Really the Problem?

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The problem of ensuring a fair distribution of public resources amongst unequals has attracted the attention of planners and academicians from time immemorial in different societies. The content of the enquiries and context of the solution may have varied but not in an unrelated manner.<sup>1</sup> The powerful moralising and civilising influence of commerce was summarised as: 'Let us recognize this profound truth. What is best for all of us is best for each one of us.'<sup>2</sup> The allocation of resources by the market was best for all of us and so, it must be good for each one of us. This assumption of neo-classical economic tradition soon became a 'proven' fact.<sup>3</sup> However, in many developing countries, the scope for public policy in the distribution of goods and services was not only recognised but in some cases even enshrined in the constitution. The public sector, public policy and state bureaucracies became the instrumentalities through which the state—a welfare one—was expected to manifest its choices.

The contradictions were inherent in a mixed economic frame-

<sup>1</sup>Albert O. Hirschman, Rival Interpretations of Market Society; Civilizing Destructive, or Feeble, *Journal of Economic Literature*, Vol. XX, 1982, pp. 1463-1984.

<sup>2</sup>Richard Nixon, quoted in Randall Bartlett, Economics, Power and the Myth of the 'Public Interest', Research Paper No. 11, Economics Dept., Williams College, Mass., 1978.

<sup>3</sup>Bartlett, *op.cit.*

work chosen by the planners. However the state through public services, wanted to achieve what markets could not.

But how was the state to achieve this? The answer obviously was the bureaucracy. But the Weberian legacy of bureaucratic ideal and the reality was not lost sight of. As pointed out in a seminal contribution, the problem was essentially defined as evolving a new breed of administrator for fulfilling the social developmental objectives of the state. He should be 'innovative, risk-taking and achievement oriented.... [He should not] place organizational structures, rules and procedures above the needs of target achievement. In short, the developmental job was accepted more as a function of individual administrative behaviour or style'<sup>4</sup> rather than any structural characteristic of the instrument itself, i.e., the nature of organisational design, access rules, monitoring system and accountability norms for the public systems.

Not only was a new field of development administration<sup>5</sup> created, but the direction of this field was also, quite paradoxically, so defined that a large number of questions organically related to the access of poor to public bureaucracies and their inner contradictions, <sup>here</sup> avoided. While we will not go into the details of this unfortunate development in public policy and administration discipline here, a comment is worth recalling since it sums up the paradox quite aptly:

Public policy (and certainly development policy) studies and disciplines are bureaucratic institutions themselves. There are

<sup>4</sup>Kuldeep Mathur, *Sources of Indian Bureaucratic Behaviour: Organizational Environment and Political Pressures in Rajasthan*, Occasional Monograph, HCM Institute of Public Administration, Jaipur, 1972, p. 2. The study very interestingly demonstrates (what perhaps remains valid even after a decade-and-a-half and for the whole country), that in a society with a feudalistic and colonial past, the most admired qualities of administrators by bureaucrats and technocrats were good behaviour, morality and honesty. The work performance and decision-making qualities attracted low priority. Undoubtedly, the meaning of development compatible with such an image of goodness would be quite different from what would be the case in a result-oriented society.

<sup>5</sup>It does not have to be said that dichotomy between regulatory and developmental administration is quite false. There is nothing in the former which does not have implications for the latter and vice versa.

set practices for constructing the problems of development policy discussion so that they can be more easily handled and controlled. Each specialist, discipline or sectoral concern (input-output, policy analysis, implementation, nutrition, risk-benefit, etc.) in the study of development policies ends by arguing that things 'would be better' if a sectoral or institutional status was given to that particular body of specialists. Anyway the approach accepts the bureaucratization of public policy. It simply wants to add other bureaucrats.<sup>6</sup>

How people become target groups<sup>7</sup> and poor the 'weaker sections' (though bearing the heaviest burden) then becomes the problem of description.<sup>8</sup> Every description, as we know, suffers from the selective choices regarding the parts of the observed phenomena serving our predictive or prescriptive interests. Essentially, therefore, the problem of organising equity must first be tackled at the definitional level. What are the relevant variables and how should we conceptualise the relationship between them, would in turn define the range of questions about the phenomena that we should address ourselves to, to generate possible solutions.

This paper first deals with the conceptual framework in which bureaucratic response to the problem of equity in delivery can be matched with the socio-ecological basis of inequity of demand from the poor. Later we discuss the specific instances of public policies which this framework helps in understanding. Our contention finally is that the neglect of certain variables in the dominant western developmental theory concerning public policy organisations and administration should not prevent the emergence of a more valid and relevant analytical framework. The ultimate utility of the framework would depend upon whether it builds new bridges or burns the existing ones amongst different disciplines.

<sup>6</sup>Bernard Schaffer, *Towards Responsibility: Public Policy in Concept and Practice*, in E.J. Clay and B.B. Schaffer eds., *Room for Manoeuvre*, London, Heinemann Educational Books, 1984, p. 167.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>8</sup>Amartya Sen, *Description of a Choice*, *Oxford Economic Papers*, Vol. 32(3), 1980, p. 367.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*

*Socio-ecological Paradigm Redefining the Reality*

## CHOICES IN THE DESCRIPTION OF THE PROBLEM

How do we define the problem? Is there something basically inadequate in the dominant framework of analysis? Is there a pattern in the way some particular problems of development in our society are consistently described? Description requires a prior theory. However, the famous debate on 'F' Twist between Samuelson and Milton Friedman underscored the following:

(a) 'If the abstract model contains empirical falsities, we must jettison the models, not gloss over their inadequacies.'<sup>10</sup> For Friedman<sup>11</sup> an inverse relation existed between accuracy of assumptions and predictive success. He claimed that an 'economic theory should not be criticised for containing "unreal" assumptions: the only legitimate way to criticise an economic theory is to point out that its predictions are at variance with facts'.<sup>12</sup> (b) If the inverse relation actually existed, as posited above, Friedman would be quite willing to sacrifice accuracy.<sup>13</sup>

While the need for adopting paradigmatic presuppositions prior to any scientific enquiry has been quite well argued by Kuhn, he warned that such a process could, 'insulate the community from those socially important problems that are not reducible to puzzle form, because they cannot be stated in terms of the conceptual and instrumental tools the paradigm supplies.'<sup>14</sup> What Bartlett suggested about economic theory applies equally well to public policy and administration, i.e., the absence of explicit discussion on power and conflicts inherent in public choices blunt the edges of enquiry. And power not merely of individuals or institutions but even of assumptions. Thus if the

<sup>10</sup>Samuelson quoted in Sen, *op. cit.*, p. 356.

<sup>11</sup>M. Friedman, *Essays in Positive Economics*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1953.

<sup>12</sup>Alan Musgrave, 'Unreal Assumptions' in *Economic Theory: The F-Twist Untwisted*, *Kyklos*, 34 Fasc. 3, 1981, pp. 377-87.

<sup>13</sup>Sen, *op. cit.*, p. 356.

<sup>14</sup>Thomas Kuhn, *The Theory of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago, 1962, p. 37.

problem of rural development was defined in terms of bureaucratic inertia, the solution had to be training for behavioural change and incentives for higher motivation.<sup>15</sup> How powerful these assumptions could be is gauged by noticing the near absence of studies that describe and then analyse institutional problems with the help of variables that were either not behavioural, attitudinal and motivational or were not intra-organisational. The tendency to invariably attribute the behaviour of organisations to individuals in organisations has been decried<sup>16</sup> and yet hardly any viable alternatives have emerged so far. Extensive review of studies in developing countries have shown that 'each time the environment is involved, the theory developed for western setting does not apply, because it assumes contingencies that may not be valid for developing countries'.<sup>17</sup> A similar conclusion was reached by the author earlier.<sup>18</sup>

How do we conceptualise the environment of developmental bureaucracies such that an objective measurement can be made of its major characteristics? The essential requirements of a

<sup>15</sup>Also see V.R. Gaikwad, *Analytical Study on Training of Agricultural Administrators in India*, FAO study, CMA-IIM Ahmedabad, 1985.

<sup>16</sup>Bill McKelvey and Howard Aldrich, Population, Natural Selection and Applied Organizational Science, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 28 1983, p. 117. Even though the authors criticise the tendency to rely on the perceptions of the managers in organisations to describe the organisational actions because of obvious class bias, they tend to put a very heavy reliance on population ecology model which nearly equals the neo-classical model of economy where the most fit firm or form of firm survived or was selected. The fact that there were problems in conceptualising the exit or entry of public bureaucracies in the same manner indicated inapplicability of the alternative analytical framework the authors provide.

<sup>17</sup>Moses M. Kiggundu, Jon J. Jorgensen and Taieb Hafsi, Administrative Theory and Practice in Developing Countries: A Synthesis, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 28, p. 81. The authors reviewed all the articles dealing with developing countries (n=36) published in *ASQ* during 1956-81 besides 772 article abstracts published during 1971-81 in management contents, economic abstracts and international and sociological abstracts.

<sup>18</sup>Anil K. Gupta, *Designing Developmental Organisations: Search for an Indian Theory*, Ahmedabad, IIM, Working Paper No. 444, 1982. This paper provides extensive review of given theories to argue in context of public organisations as to how search for more indigenous culturally compatible framework can be made.

theory to be valid are generalisability, testability and replicability.

The need for such a framework can also prove beneficial to planners.<sup>19</sup> They have to deal with the ecological and institutional diversity of a large country and conceive designs of a delivery system that would hopefully fit the whole range of diversity. Very often only that data goes into policy-making which relates to either a particular pilot project or some generalised evaluations of earlier programmes which, like a 'rear view mirror',<sup>20</sup> illuminate the path already travelled but provide no help in choosing the direction which should be followed. The socio-ecological paradigm hopefully does not suffer from the above inadequacy.

### *The Paradigm*

In rural India, despite massive investments in the development of infrastructure in the post-independence era, there remain large parts of the country where the ecological conditions, i.e., the natural resource endowments or environment, defines the range of economic investments that can be made by various classes of rural producers. For instance, in almost 60-70 per cent of the rainfed regions of our country, the outer limits of what can be grown on lands of varying fertility level, topography, size, etc., are predominantly determined by the seasons. There are eco-specific (i.e., region specific) patterns of cropping system, livestock enterprise mix, craft activities, labour skill mix and mobility patterns, besides, of course, kinship networks and exchange relations. How have these patterns emerged and what are their determinants?

Historically, in any ecological context, say a hot, arid, tropical, drought-prone region, we may find a variety of combinations of crops, livestock, trees, crafts and labour enterprises,

<sup>19</sup>Also see, Yogesh Atal, Using the Social Sciences for Policy Formulation, *International Social Science Journal*, Vol. XXXV (2), 1983, pp. 367-77.

<sup>20</sup>Samuel T. Coleridge said 'To most men, experience is like the stern lights of a ship, which illumines only the track it has passed.' Quoted in Neri H. Barrington, Computer at Wits End Leads to Process Pattern Recognition, *Ontario Dev. Crop* (mimeo).

which different economic classes of farming households have evolved through a process of trial and error. These combinations do not vary, however, in an infinite range. Studies<sup>21</sup> have shown that the ratio of livestock species, for instance, cattle, buffalo, bullock, camel, goat, and sheep, varies within a narrow range in any given well-defined watershed or regional limit.

The scale at which different classes manage these enterprises does not however depend upon ecology. The scale is a function of access which the different classes have acquired to land, labour credit and the product markets, besides non-monetised exchange system and risk-bearing capacities. This access also defines the degree of risk inherent in various combinations of enterprises. One way to objectively measure the risk with which different classes have to adjust themselves with, is to use the matrix shown in Figure 1.<sup>22</sup>

FIGURE 1

Mean level of income or outputs	Variance in Investment/Outputs	
	Low	High
Low	LMLV	LMHV
High	HMLV	HMHV

The high mean-high variance enterprises would characterise those producers who are capable of taking high risks, have sound access to product and factor markets, and have accumulated sufficient surpluses so as to absorb risks without any crisis.

<sup>21</sup>Anil K. Gupta, *Socio-ecology of Land Use Planning in Semi-arid Regions*, IIM Ahmedabad, 1982; also see *Small Farmer Household Economy in Semi-arid Regions* (henceforth SFHHE), IIM, CMA project report, 1984 (mimeo).

<sup>22</sup>This matrix was first developed as a part of an action-research project at IIPA on District Project Planning coordinated by Prof. Kuldeep Mathur (1978-81). Also see Anil K. Gupta, *Viable Projects for Unviable Farmers*, IIPA & IIM, CMA, 1981 (mimeo).

They are, incidentally, also the so-called, 'progressive' farmers, 'opinion' leaders and 'contact farmers'.

In contrast, those managing an enterprise mix which generated low mean-high variance in output or income would be the deficit budget households—most vulnerable to environmental risks.

The question then arises: How does public policy deal with different classes of people variously vulnerable to the risks—environmental, market, institutional or otherwise? Let us for illustrative purposes take the sub-sets with low population density, highly diversified enterprise mix and accompanied by high seasonality. The image that it conjures pertain to semi-arid tropics. In drought-prone areas where the settlement structure is scattered and the soil is shallow, light, loose and with low fertility, such that subsistence cannot be achieved by relying on cultivation of crops alone, the simultaneous involvement in livestock, craft and labour markets is essential for survival.

What are the institutional implications of the above framework? How can we use the type of perspective we obtain from above in organising equity and managing the problem of access? What are the social imperatives of ecological conditions? How do market forces emerge, and is there a pattern in the allocation of resources by the public and private sector institutions while dealing with such settings? Is the exclusion of the poor thus a systematic outcome of public policy instead of being an implementation inefficiency?

Several other issues could arise but providing answers to all of them is clearly beyond the scope of this paper. However we must outline those contradictions which make us suggest that the dominant solutions to the current problems of equity, evolved historically are, infact, the key problems. We have to discredit the 'solutions' which prevent the generation of more precise questions and thus more pertinent answers. Instead of *feasible politics*, we need to highlight the role of social scientists in politics of making options relevant to the poor feasible.

### *The Problem of Equity*

The nature of surplus accumulation in the socio-ecological set-



ting described above would be quite eco-specific. The exchange relations in different markets would reflect the consequences of differential accumulatory tendencies. For instance, studies have shown that rates of interest,<sup>23</sup> pattern of land transfer,<sup>24</sup> kinship relations and norms of pooling and redistribution,<sup>25</sup> labour mobility,<sup>26</sup> ownership pattern of livestock species; cropping system,<sup>27</sup> etc., are highly ecology and class specific.

The browsers are mainly owned by the landless and poor farmers whereas most of the grazers (particularly high-value ones like buffaloes) are predominantly owned by richer farmers. The credit market constraints affected different classes differently, i.e., not only did the size of loan differ, but the interest rates too, in the informal market varied essentially because of the difference in collaterals and partly due to the inter-locking of markets; intra-village land transactions in totally dry villages were much fewer than in irrigated villages mainly because the rates and size of capital accumulation of different sized landholdings did not vary as much in the former case as in the latter case, though livestock transactions showed the opposite trend for obvious reasons. The eco- and class specificity of nature of different economic transactions, particularly in regions where market penetration is low, has been quite convincingly demonstrated in various studies by the author. The emergence of a socio-ecological paradigm intersecting disciplines of public administration, management, economics, sociology, ecology and political science offers a whole range of different questions concerning public policy and equity as discussed below.

### *The Solutions that are the Problems*

'Equity is about rule. Rules means institutions. The experience

<sup>23</sup>Gupta, 1984, *op cit.*

<sup>24</sup>Gupta, 1981, *op cit.*

<sup>25</sup>Anil K. Gupta, Farmers' Response to Cooperative Project Implementation, IPA and IIM Ahmedabad, 1981 (mimeo). See also Gupta, Why don't Poor Cooperate: A Study of Traditional Forms of Cooperation with Implications for Modern Organization, IIM Ahmedabad, Working Paper 468, revised and enlarged, 1984.

<sup>26</sup>Anil K. Gupta, Seasonality, Stratification and Staying on Process in Semi-arid Regions, IIM Ahmedabad, Working Paper No. 428, 1982.

<sup>27</sup>Anil K. Gupta, SFHHE, 1984, *op cit.*

of equity one way or another is then experience of institutional encounters: "access experience". This is more or less unavoidable.<sup>28</sup> Is it so really? Is there an inevitability of inequity, no matter what was the nature of public policy and biases inherent in it?

The solution—that institutional counters have to be broken down so that there is no difference between the people who demand and the people who supply<sup>29</sup>—is essentially an utopia in which, ultimately, communes will have come into existence. The state, in such a case, would have withered away. But the solution is not really that anarchic. The subtleties become apparent when the proposed strategy is said

to be particularly interested in the provision of market surrogates, in improved opportunities of control over institutions, in supplementary and supportive system of applicant organization and in the end an increased capacity of people to handle their access situations by understanding them and by having authority and resources to decide about them.<sup>30</sup>

But will the market act as a monitor of equity?<sup>31</sup> Can market surrogates be provided for discrimination between *need* and *demand*? Who will provide opportunities of greater control to the victims of the political, bureaucratic or academic elite? Will not the social analyst recognise, that 'it is difficult to take account of the circumstances of vulnerable people in policy-making processes without either being utopian about policy or turning them into "target groups". . . . It is difficult [also] to escape from sectoralization of policy with all the cramping consequences.'<sup>32</sup> The solution to overcome these difficulties is to recognise that public policy is an outcome of chances of pur-

<sup>28</sup>Bernard Schaffer, *Official Providers*, Paris, UNESCO, 1978.

<sup>29</sup>B. Schaffer and Geoff Lamb, *Can Equity be Organised?* UK, UNESCO and Gower, 1981. p. 108.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid*, p. 109.

<sup>31</sup>Anil K. Gupta, Why Don't We Learn, IIM Ahmedabad, Working Paper No. 542, 1984. This paper was presented at the National Seminar on Community Participation and Rural Development, University of Delhi.

<sup>32</sup>Clay and Schaffer, *op. cit.*, 1984, p. 192.

poses and accidents.<sup>33</sup> Is it really so? Was bank nationalisation really an accident? Were the systematic efforts in rural credit policy which discriminated against poor dry farmers and labourers also an accident? Was the public distribution system and policy for essential commodities for differentially vulnerable regions also accidental? How do we explain the logic behind the public policy of establishing *sedentary* organisations in regions where a majority of the poor are *mobile* (seasonal migrants) and where at least for half the year, households are headed by women, old people or even by the infirm? There can be an equally large number of policies which might have been truly accidental. But to suggest this as the explanation for the dominant mode of mainstream public policy-making, is to considerably dilute the effect of the dominant world view forming theoretical prejudices, i.e., growth centre, diffusion of innovation, model of bureaucratic neutrality, 'betting on the best', target group or basic need approach, etc.<sup>34</sup>

uniform

While we don't believe in the tempting but fragile conspiracy theories explaining consistent biases in policies, we must mention unhesitatingly that there exists sufficient evidence to suggest that academics legitimise, through their discourses, continued hegemony of many theories that generate anti-poor policy alternatives. To convert problems of political choices into those of administrative reform or management efficiency is one way of doing so. The translation of structural and design problems into problems of bureaucratic behaviour, attitudes and incentives, is another example. To conceptualise bureaucracy as a homogeneous mass guided by similar concerns and devoid of contradictions is still another way of reinforcing the policy-implementation dichotomy. Policies are good and implementation bad, is now a worn-out cliché, though still very popular. The question that arises is why is it so popular?

The planners plan while the bureaucracy implements. The

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup>Target group approach assumed that it was possible to direct policies aimed at poverty alleviation without changing the overall policy planning context. The basic need model in effect became an apologia for the State's helplessness in meeting more than the basic needs of the poor whereas similar apathy disappears while meeting all needs (basic as well as not so basic) needs of the rich.

rest follows. The administrators-turned-academics add one more false dichotomy: Senior bureaucrats are sincere, committed and concerned while the lower level bureaucracy is irresponsible, corrupt and anti-poor. Many social scientists, by concentrating their enquiries only upon junior civil servants (because they are accessible and provide data easily), provide a large mass of data/evidence on the inefficiencies of the system. The top level policy planning system is given the benefit of doubt or is labelled (using sweeping generalisations) so that hearsay becomes the truth, dogmas become the gospel. What cannot be studied easily becomes unworthy of study. Hence the problem.

There are also sometimes attempts made to internalise radical rhetoric. One such case is regarding the organisation of the poor. In developed regions, if services work efficiently, the credit goes to bureaucratic efficiency and motivation.<sup>35</sup> In the backward regions with low population density, poor living conditions, higher stress, the poor must organise and make demands on the delivery system so as to get its genuine needs met! Naivety knows no limits or levels.

### *Where do We go from Here?*

We shall summarise some of the directions which future research could take in the task of organising equity or participation in politics of making equity feasible and more purposeful.

#### ROLE OF SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

Concentrating on studies only at the micro level has now become an obsession.<sup>36</sup> The politics of institutionalising inequity

<sup>35</sup>See numerous studies on Karnal, an IADP district, making this point with very few exceptions, e.g., Kuldeep Mathur, *Bureaucracy and New Strategy of Agricultural Strategy*, New Delhi, Concept, 1983.

<sup>36</sup>I am as guilty of this failure as others. However, it was learned recently that 'to institutionalize even a small change at micro level, several simultaneous minor and major changes were required at middle and higher level not only in the organization or department concerned but also in several other supporting public systems.' A question also raised was 'Whether one was expected to act at the same level where the research was being done?' Kuldeep Mathur and Anil K. Gupta, *Action Research for Micro Level Planning: A Self Appraisal*, IRAS, L (1), 1984, pp. 60-68.

at the macro level deserves urgent study. One way to do so would be for those who attend meetings at the central or state ministerial levels or in the planning commission to involve the wider public in the games that are played there. We will cite three instances to make the point more clear.

- (a) As a part of a working group for the Seventh Five-Year Plan on cottage and khadi village industries set up by a state government, a question arose about fixing targets for different trades in different districts. The general tendency of providing equal numbers to maintain a false equity was followed.<sup>37</sup> When an academic member asked for data on tribals and non-tribals engaged in different crafts in different seasons in various districts, he drew a blank. Such data was never considered relevant.
- (b) In a sub-group on drought prone areas and land reform set up by the planning commission, evidence was presented about the tendency of concentrating public resources in non-drought prone pockets of such districts. One explanation was the absence of any risk absorption mechanism in the policies. The result was low demand for public resources from the regions where the need was maximum. The final document acknowledged the problem but considered the existing policy trend valid and sound. More of the same became an easy escape.
- (c) Likewise, when a new policy which was to be followed by the IRDP in the Seventh Five-Year Plan was leaked to the press, a rejoinder was sent to the Planning Commission. The thrust of the new policy was to provide a link between poverty and population, i.e., to have more allocation under IRDP for regions with a higher population density. During the first phase of the IRDP in 1977-78, the backward blocks had three times the share of the developed blocks. On 2 October 1980, it was discovered that the problem of poverty was equally important in all the districts. Hence the district-wise allocations were made

<sup>37</sup>The national programme of Integrated Rural Development tries to achieve a similar sense of false equity. All districts are supposed to have the problem of poverty in the same proportion. See Point (c) above.

equal. In 1984, the incapacity of the concerned ministry to exhaust the budget in backward regions even with equal shares, forced the pendulum to swing to the other extreme. In regions where the risks were fewer, the endowment of natural resource better, growth rates high and (hence) population density also more, the targets were increased. The underlying logic of ease in budget exhaustion (a criterion of performance to the government) was not made apparent. So much so that the belief in trickle down or 'modified trickle down' was not used to argue reliance on market forces in developed districts so that the state could concentrate only on those districts where these forces were weak or near absent (because of absence of surpluses). The note of the academic invitee to the working group was circulated among all the members of the group and there ended the story. The policy bias continues.

What do we learn from these illustrations? The nature of policy at the macro level which militates against the interests of the poor has to be made explicit and counteracted. The risk of losing invitations and consultancies will have to be squarely faced. Data will have to be sought from senior policy makers and refusals will have to be publicised.

#### HATCHING THE EGG: MAKING TRADE-OFF EXPLICIT

Even if the public policies are not the outcome of a rational, scientific process of listing alternatives and choosing the most viable or feasible one, some choices, nevertheless, are made. Reasons for making these choices, however, are seldom made public. At times an impression is given that the state wanted to incorporate public opinion in policy making. The large-scale involvement of academics in the Seventh Five-Year Plan was an unprecedented case. But participation in incubation is not the same as participation in laying the egg.

There is a need to demonstrate the following contradictions to confront policy-makers with concrete alternatives:

- (a) In regions with low population density, it takes more time to reach the same number of people; it costs more

to set up basic infrastructure and service it because the utilisation rate is low; more extension workers are required to provide effective access to any new technology, etc. However, we notice the opposite. Standardisation in allocation of funds, manpower and resources and the absence of discrimination becomes most discriminatory.<sup>38</sup>

- (b) The poor, having experienced historical deprivation, often don't demand resources. Repeated humiliations are not a pleasant experience for anyone, certainly not for the poor. Their lack of demand is interpreted as lack of need and therefore still lesser provision of facilities triggers the ratchet of still lesser utilisation.

At times, to provide equity in the number of services, the content is changed.

In a primary school in a tribal district of Madhya Pradesh, minimum qualifications of a primary school teacher was middle pass.<sup>39</sup> Surely none of us would like our children to be educated in such a school. Furthermore, the possibility does not arise that the primary schools located near the places where we live will ever recruit a middle pass as a teacher. If such a teacher also interprets his role in a similar vein as policy-makers do, we should not be surprised to find a higher drop-out rate in the backward regions. Why do such anomalies with regard to fairness in providing opportunities guaranteed under

<sup>38</sup>The idea that administrative effort must be correlated with the justness of the policies strikes at conventional assumptions about administrative neutrality. Therefore, it is most important to distinguish between legitimate administrative neutrality, as required by the law of the land, and the administrative neutrality that is nothing more than the wish to avoid moral responsibility for anything beyond task proficiency. That latter proposition appeals to many, since it relieves them of the need to tackle the difficult problems of right and wrong. Hart questions the trend of equating public administration with business administration and suggests bringing the moral criterion to the central place. David Hart, 'The Honorable Bureaucrat among the Philistines: A Reply to "Ethical Discourses in Public Administration"', *Administration and Society*, 15 (1), 1983, p. 48. What follows from this is that uniformity of allocations can no more be allowed to pass under the label of administrative neutrality.

<sup>39</sup>Anil K. Gupta and Manu Shroff, *Learning to Unlearn*, CMA-PSG report of an action research project, IIM Ahmedabad, 1985 (mimeo).

the Constitution (particularly after the insertion of the word 'socialist' by the 42nd amendment) become a non-issue? The solution does not lie in providing training in motivation to such teachers or in allowing non-governmental organisations to look after such services, but in withdrawing state subsidies for services utilised by the better off sections of society (who can afford to pay market prices). Unless somebody loses, somebody else cannot gain in a resource scarce society. The question is who will lose and how: will markets ever make those who can pay most lose? How do we visualise the role of the state<sup>40</sup> and help in making the trade-offs explicit? Responsibility avoidance in public policy is the key game.<sup>41</sup> And social scientists and policy analysis are not immune to the temptations that the game leaders provide.

There are several other aspects of public policy and the state-of-art with regard to its analysis that need questioning. The socio-ecological framework presented here hopefully facilitates the task of making the underlying choices in public policy explicit. Let us not subserve our responsibility behind attractive cliches like organisation of poor or a stateless state. The existence of coercion is an integral element of survival of a state. What needs to be ensured, however, is that this coercion does not always work against the poor. Those who can make sacrifices least should not be forced to make these *today* so that they should be better-off *tomorrow*. Politics of making iniquitous policy choices feasible in the name of a better tomorrow gets legitimacy by those who labour hard to demonstrate the insurmountable difficulties that characterise institutional redesign. Those who want to wait till the *total* structural change in society has taken place also confuse patience with responsibility. Irresponsibility of this patience and the ethical dilemma ingrained in generating false dichotomies in public policy and ethical analysis pose a serious challenge to concerned social scientists.

<sup>40</sup>Anil K. Gupta, *Role of Public Enterprises in Backward Regions: Generating Peasants' Perspectives*, IIM Ahmedabad, 1984.

<sup>41</sup>Clay and Schaffer, 1984, *op. cit.* Also see, Anil K. Gupta, *Monitoring of Rural Projects through People's Participation*, *EKISTICS*, pp. 291-441; and Abonyig, *SIAM: Strategic Impact and Assumptions—Identification Method for Project, Program and Policy Planning*, *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 22, 1982, pp. 31-52.



The socio-ecological paradigm helps us in the following key ways:

- (a) Precise interface between three coordinates of rural developmental problem—space, sector, seasons—and different sections or classes of society can be anticipated. Once the zone of uncertainty is reduced, the responsibility for discriminatory public policy cannot be easily shirked.
- (b) Once bureaucracies are conceptualised as conflict-ridden and the morality of their neutrality is questioned, the recent fads like 'bureaucratic ~~recreation~~', 'empowerment'<sup>42</sup> etc., become redundant and meaningless. The issue essentially is to relate macro-developmental policy with micro-allocative policy. The transformation of sectoral outlays into access spaces<sup>43</sup> is a political process. Bureaucracies manifest what planners profess.

↳ reorientation.

The paradigm provides the degree of eco-specificity that would be required in allocating bureaucratic resources and getting them utilised. If there are a large number of positions that remain vacant in backward regions, the answer would not be training and exhortations. The price for getting people to work in such contexts would have to be paid. The paradigm even provides the scope for identifying the scope/levying costs to generate resources.

↳ For

- (c) The organisation of equity is compatible with ecologically sound and socially balanced policies. The three fulcra of risk, resources and skills<sup>44</sup> on which the relationship between space, sector and season rests, are measurable and thus the framework is operational.

<sup>42</sup>Elizabeth Shields, *Social Development Management: An Annotated Bibliography*, NASPAA, USAID, Washington, 1982. There is a growing attempt by several international aid agencies to perpetuate policy-implementation dichotomy by investing huge resources in training. It is hoped by protagonists of such a policy that the bureaucracy, once motivated, will transform its role, character and structure.

<sup>43</sup>See Anil K. Gupta, Transformation of Sector into 'Access' Space, IIPA, 1980 (mimeo).

<sup>44</sup>Anil K. Gupta, Role of Public Enterprises in Backward Regions, *op. cit.*, 1984.

- (d) The intermingling of theory and practice becomes inevitable in this paradigm because the reserve of knowledge about the logic of traditional risk adjustment devices lies with the poor. It is assumed that valid meanings to various concepts can emerge only through conflictive, interactive and iterative learning. These meanings are vital for building bridges between the knowledge of the poor and the ignorance of the social analyst. It is through such bridges that communication can take place and the realm of public choice really be widened.
- (e) The theory of designing organisations that will be amenable to control by the poor cannot be developed unless proper conceptualisation of environment in which these organisations or bureaucracies have to work has been attempted. This paradigm provides scope of defining environmental parameters in an objective manner.
- (f) Finally, the issues raised in this paper, hopefully, will broaden the area of intersection amongst different disciplines so that multi-sectoral and multi-level trade-offs in public policy can be properly revealed. Let us not make the poor, who are victims, also the culprits for not making demands on the institutions which are designed to exclude them. The trickle-up of responsibility and trickle-down of accountability will hopefully help in resolving the irony of equity (through a uniform treatment of basically different problems), which in turn masks the contradiction between feasible politics<sup>45</sup> and politics of making choices of poor feasible.

<sup>45</sup>The 'feasible politics', i.e., 'politics of waiting and patiently explaining' is strongly disputed here. Abdullah, while arguing for land reform in the context of Bangladesh, suggested this as a viable alternative for social scientists. See Abu Abdullah, *Formulating a Viable Land Use Policy for Bangladesh—What do We Need to Know*, Dacca, BIDS, 1979.