

Extension's Forgotten Aim

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Extension has been long on helping societal changes occur and short on helping people adjust to these changes according to Photiadis. He suggests that a new aim for Extension should be helping people adjust to societal change. In his words, "It's crucial for those who bring about change in the community, family, or the individual's style of life, to focus on what happens to the individual's internal world during the process of change." Extension agents should serve as ". . . a buffer for change so its impact will be controlled."

Extension's new aim should be the individual's adjustment to society. The role of the Extension agent should be a buffer for change so its impact will be controlled. It's crucial for those who bring about change in the community, family, or the individual's style of life, to focus on what happens to the individual's internal world during this process of change. Any organization working with people in a changing society will: (1) "seek to understand" what is happening in today's society, (2) on the basis of known principles of change, project what societal forms are likely to exist tomorrow, and (3) in light of present and future societal forms, try to establish what role the organization should play.

The first step, is to understand the present and future forms of society. There are three characteristics of societal change.¹ First, societal change is initiated through technological change. The largest part of social movements and processes can be explained in either technology or the economic change technology produces. For example, the rebelliousness, resentment, and reaction of the urban slum dweller have roots in an economic "have-not" base. The second and third characteristics of societal change are inter-related to the rate of technological change is increasing at a greater rate each year; and technological change occurs more rapidly than sociocultural change. Societal changes are

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faster than changes in important personality attributes.

Therefore, it's important to consider change in light of three systems—culture, society, and personality. The faster technology changes, the more the individual and the groups he belongs to become dislocated in adjustment to societal and cultural environments. Value orientations and ways of life become a part of an individual's personality system over time and, thus, become guidelines for behavior. The lag between the systems in adjusting to new changes causes an incompatibility between the formed personality and the social and cultural environment. This often produces frustration, apathy, and retreatism to traditional ways of life.

Rural Appalachia

The case of rural Appalachia is an extreme example of an isolated social system. Since the 1940s, rural areas, such as rural Appalachia, have faced accelerated changes imposed by the decline of agriculture, advances in mining technology, more jobs in the city, more automobiles, better roads, and availability of television. The influence of mass society has increased, while the influence of local communities, neighborhoods, families, and other local reference groups has declined. Better transportation and migration have increased interaction with the outside, while better communication has made rural residents more aware of the urban middle-class

style of life.²

Interaction and communication with the outside are the two forces that can create new social and reference systems and de-emphasis of old ones. In rural Appalachia, the larger American society is the influential social system that is incorporating rural social systems. Satisfaction is determined more by the standards of what the rest of American society, outside Appalachia, wants. However, the rural personality developed early in life and in an isolated and homogeneous social and cultural environment differs from that of the larger society. Also, rural Appalachia doesn't offer the economic opportunities necessary to achieve society's demands. Its people weren't culturally or educationally prepared to enter the urban society where satisfactory employment was available. Geographically, therefore, the strains imposed by a technology are more severe in places isolated from the mainstream of American society.

This is an undefined problem by Extension people—the adjustment of individuals to societal change. Adjustment determines a person's long-term satisfaction with life and his long-term happiness. Happiness is a state of mind related to the balance between the individual and his social and cultural environment. It's the feeling of belonging, sharing, or participating that follows the individual's inclusion or integration into sociocultural relationships. An individual with a personality system developed early in

life and geared to rural life may have difficulty adjusting to a changing social and cultural system.

Extension Organization

Consider the importance and position of the existing organizational framework. Originally, Extension was to raise the level of living of people, primarily through better farming, and later through home-making and youth work. However, with advancing technology and change in the society of the 1940s, Extension focused its goals to "help the individual in the progress of a nation."³ Little or no consideration has been given to: (1) what is happening in the individual's internal world during the fulfillment of societal expectations and (2) in light of personal needs, how those groups can be directed toward adjustment.

This proposal does *not* suggest that raising a people's level of living shouldn't be an important concern of Extension. Rather, we suggest that both the level of living and the individual's psychic world be considered. We're proposing an aim to guide both activities, an aim that can be used as a model to select objectives and groups to help. This approach broadens the objectives and plans of Extension to include those who are eager to accept new challenges and continue to strive for higher levels of living. It also includes those who aren't able to cope with the new challenges for psychological, cultural, or physical reasons. Extension's role becomes a buffer,

cushioning and directing oncoming changes to induce the individual's adjustment to the new society.

Extension is in an excellent position to activate this aim. Presently many agencies are working to help people adjust to rapid, disruptive change. But eventually this will be performed by one segment of society. Historically, Extension has worked in just this area, along more middle-class and production-oriented lines. Further, the Land-Grant institutions in which the Extension services are based have become the primary well-springs of serious analysis of the human condition. Extension employs or is in constant contact with all kinds of experts and subject-matter specialists. Also, connections with and knowledge of various governmental agencies, particularly local governmental groups, places Extension in a unique liaison position. Thus, Extension is geared to identify problems in cooperation with academic and research units and act on these problems with available community resources.

Selecting Objectives

This proposed aim for Extension has several functions. First, it proposes action programs based on the individual's needs and long-term happiness rather than on the basis of creating socially expected images. Second, it allows the Extension planner to examine objectives ranging from assistance in the development of natural resources to treatment of welfare recipients or poten-

tial school dropouts. Third, Extension can examine all of these objectives under a single criterion—adjustment.

A difficulty arises in establishing the proposed aim. Some of the new subject-matter areas include complicated and elusive objectives. For example, if the individual's adjustment to society had been the aim of Extension 25 years ago, helping Appalachian migrants would have become an important Extension objective. Thus, in West Virginia alone, Extension would have helped 800,000 migrants who went through a series of shocks and extensive discomfort to meet the new societal expectations. A recent survey in Cleveland indicated that simple instructions and brief preparation would have been invaluable to the migrants, particularly those who left during the first 10 years of the great migration.⁴

The new aim, then, can broaden and give direction to Extension objectives.

Focusing on the individual's adjustment to society as an aim would also allow the Extension planner to look at a variety of groups. Let's consider those who haven't been able to compete in the new society and have joined the welfare roles. These people are dislocated in terms of societal adjustment. We should try to cure the causes of their apathy and their retreat. Before helping them get a job, Extension must prepare them psychologically. Creating interaction situations such as group therapy to

incur attitude change and morale building could be useful. In cooperation with retraining agencies, Extension could serve as a referral service to help the individual take advantage of existing opportunities for retraining and employment. This process could help welfare cases to again join the mainstream of life in our society.

Also, we could examine other programs of Extension: programs for youth and women. Youth groups such as the school dropouts could be an important target group. The research unit of Extension could suggest which tests could best predict the potential dropouts from among the rural Appalachian high school students. The Mink Scale of prediction of dropout proneness is an example of such a test.⁵ In many rural low-income counties where education has become the way to secure the level of living society expects, the dropout rate is as high as 85 per cent. These tests could pinpoint the potential dropouts. Then Extension could help attract and organize these students into a club or group that could offer them interaction. Cooperation could come from contacts with other youth groups and government agencies.

Eleanor Glenn, CES Program Leader for Women, West Virginia, indicated in a survey of Extension's programs for women that most of the activities of home agents involve club work. The survey also revealed that overall membership came from the middle- and upper-class older women. When selecting its objec-

tives, Extension should consider the role of the low-income housewife who helps her family cope with the pressures of societal adjustment. But, this group is difficult to approach, organize, and work with. However, the research unit of Extension could suggest ways of approaching and organizing these women so that work with them could be possible.

Considering the two objectives we're focused on—low-income groups and sociopsychological problems—raises two points. First, it isn't suggested that these be the target areas receiving top priority in Extension activities. These two areas have been discussed more extensively because they've received too little attention by Extension. Secondly, we don't propose that more objectives be added to the goals of Extension work, but that a single tool be selected that will help us (a) see new and important objectives and (b) select under a single criterion the objectives crucial to the individual's basic needs and long-term satisfaction with life.

Summary

There are several points to consider when looking at Extension's aim of emphasizing the individual's adjustment to society. First, there will be a definite need for an organization with a philosophy and structure such as Extension.

Second, the new aim considers all possible objectives under a single criterion. This includes objectives

dealing with adjustment, directly, for example, group therapy and occupational retraining of welfare recipients; and indirectly, for example, assistance in developing natural resources, agricultural and otherwise, that will help human adjustment.

Third, Extension doesn't need drastic changes to implement the new aim. More than anything, it needs a philosophy that will help Extension become both a practical and theoretical enterprise.

Fourth, the new aim should be associated with higher morale and a stronger feeling of fulfillment by both administration and personnel. These feelings should become instrumental in (a) favorably disposing personnel to go through the uncomfortable task of changing occupational orientation when necessary and (b) helping personnel to overcome the frustration of an occupation involving shifting and often unclear objectives.

Fifth, an aim of this nature will allow not only the examination of all possible objectives under a single criterion, but also the selection of new areas of subject matter, associations with new branches of scientific institutions, and changes in organizational structure.

We suggest a reconsideration of position based on a single criterion of additional objectives, some of which could be social or sociopsychological. But in particular, we propose that all objectives be evaluated on the basis of what their influence on the internal world of the individual will be, and not on the cre-

ation of socially desired images—which seems to be Extension's main concern today. The new role of Extension in society today becomes, even more so than in the past, management of the effects of change on the individual's world.⁶

Footnotes

1. See Wilbert Moore, *Social Change* (New York, New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), pp. 10-11.
2. Theoretically, due to mass media and increased contacts with the outside, rural communities are becoming more a part of the larger American society and, therefore, respond more to its normative patterns. Consequently, the money one is making now and the level of living he's sustaining is determined more in comparison not only to those in the rural community, but the urban lower-middle class.
3. Lincoln David Kelsey and Cannon Chiles Hearne, *Cooperative Extension Work* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1955), p. 109.
4. John Photiadis, *Sociopsychological Characteristics of West Virginians in Cleveland and Their Own State* (Morgantown: West Virginia University, Division of Personal and Family Development, Appalachian Center, 1969).
5. Lawrence Baker and Oscar Mink, *The Mink Scale—An Aid in the Identification of Dropout Prone Students in the Appalachian Junior High Schools*, Information Series No. 1 (Morgantown: West Virginia University, Division of Personal and Family Development, Appalachian Center, 1968).
6. For a more explicit interpretation of the function of the new aim, see John Photiadis and Harry Schwatzweller, *Social Change in Rural Appalachia—Implications for Action Programs* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970), ch. 15.