

Thinking About Rural Development.—By Arther T. Mosher. New York: Agricultural Development Council, Inc., 1976. xii+pp. 350.

This book is essentially a selection of the articles written by Arther T. Mosher during his long career as a rural development expert. Also appended at the end is a complete list of writings by him. The Agricultural Development Council has chosen to publish this book to honour the author, who was its President during 1967-1973.

The publication of this book is welcome in the context of the recent rediscovery of rural development as a principal plank of need-oriented development strategies. A basic defect of writing on rural development has been excessive resort to stereotype rehtoric, over-enthusiasm and a certain pedanticism. Fortunately, Mosher's orientation is practical, not doctrinaire. Although the book is titled "Thinking About Rural Development", the author keeps on bringing together the thinking and practice into their validly interactive perspectives. Not surprisingly so, for the author has himself worked in the field as a rural development practitioner for a considerable length of time.

The book deals with rural development projects, extension programmes, research activity, role of educational institutions such as universities, and socio-cultural factors. Apart from the short introduction by Vernon W. Ruttan, Chapter I of the book, titled "Reflections on Rural Development in South and Southeast Asia" serves as a comprehensive introduction to the theory and practice of rural development at the beginning of 1950s, the subsequent disillusionment and the strategies followed in the intervening period of 1955-1975. He then goes on to define rural development in an all-embracing and serviceable manner. The agricultural and non-agricultural components of rural development have been clearly delineated for operational purposes. The income and population dimension has also been touched upon in this chapter.

While discussing projects, the author thinks that the integrated projects have matured in the past two decades. Taking the example of the projects set up in Allahabad (India) and Los Banos (Philippines), he concludes that administrative experimentation can and must be a "way of life" in rural sector. In latter chapters, an agenda for research has been presented and institutional requirements spelt out.

The practical orientation of the book gets somewhat injured when the author comes to discussing the inter-relationship between agricultural development, social organization and personal attitudes and values. He thinks the interaction of the triumvirate displays reciprocity. The elegance of the analytics is indisputable, but to assume that the variables involved behave as they do neatly according to this model is an abstraction no rural development practitioner will comfortably buy. Mosher talks of a certain "analytical machine" that the graduate schools tend to mass-produce (p. 29). But his own discourse on the relationship between socio-culture and agriculture would perhaps be produced by this analytical machine.

The question of questions, however, is: Are we moving back to square one? Are we saying the same thing in seventies that we used to preach in fifties when rural development meant creation of a "rational rural man"? What is being aimed at in the seventies—rural basic needs, urban-rural equity, intra-rural justice, or what? These are issues to the understanding of which Mosher's book is a valuable aid, but as a guide for practical actions, one may well have to wait for his further experimentations in this part of Asia.