

**Dietmar Herbon:** Ein dörfliches Gesellschaftssystem in Bangladesh. Mechanismen, Funktionen und Dynamik des sozio-ökonomischen Austausches. (Sozialökonomische Schriften zur ruralen Entwicklung, 47). Göttingen: Edition Herodot, 1984. XVIII, 433 pp., DM 33.-

**Dietmar Herbon:** The System of Exchange and Distribution in a Village in Bangladesh. (Socio-Economic Studies in Rural Development, 58). Göttingen: Edition Herodot, 1985. 177 pp., DM 22.-

Bangladesh has been the test case for development since independence. More than in any other Asian country it had to be financed by outside sources, i.e. mainly through aid from foreign donors. It is only natural that aid brought quite a number of foreigners into the country to analyse its socio-economic problems, changing their focus as they became more associated with the country's development problems. Characteristic of the first studies was the macro view: the East-West disparity within undivided Pakistan, the emergence of the new state, a first stock-taking of its assets and problems, especially those of population growth, food, foreign trade and debt. The fact that these problems could not be solved with macro-approaches alone, had soon to be recognized, and the local aspect of socio-economic development began to be studied more intensively. Being predominantly rural and agricultural, any solution of the country's many social and economic problems (and their repercussions on the political stability of the country, if not the region) should start in the rural sphere.

This approach also applies to the present study, a Göttingen Ph. D. thesis in agricultural sciences, published in German (G) and in an abridged form in English (E), minus some of the theoretical elaborations and most of the statistics.

The author aims at the double task of developing (1) a theoretical framework for explaining the behaviour and reaction of the village people and (2) theoretical insights into development policy. For this purpose, he examines the micro level with the help of a case study (village society), step by step formulates theoretical concepts of the functions and dynamics of the macro system and transforms this into a model. These factors are explicated and depicted on the basis of empirical data collected by the author during his thirteen months' stay and field work. The level of analysis is the whole village. The actors within the village are the heads of the households, seen both as individuals and as representatives of their respective households. Their statements, decisions and acts are taken as substitutes of those of the households.

The study was undertaken in collaboration with the Rural Development Academy, Bogra, thus making field work in the vicinity of this institution advisable. The village selected is within walking distance (1 km) from the 'thana' headquarter.

ter Sariakandi and less than one hour by bus from Bogra, the district capital (for this district see also Markus Spinatsch's book, reviewed in Vol. 16 (1985), 3/4, p. 385-387).

The study (G; E almost identical) is divided into three parts: (I) introduction, (II) mechanisms, functions, and dynamics of a closed resp. open societal system, and (III) conclusion. The open system (A) is dealt with under the following headings: (1) the social structure in the survey village - theory and empirical data, (2) exchange amongst households - the static-mechanical model of relation, (3) the societal exchange and distribution structure - and the dynamic model, and (4) mechanisms and structures of socio-economic exchange. The closed system (B) focusses on (1) the environment of village systems, (2) external interventions - development policy in the village, and (3) view of the overall system.

The author summarizes his results as follows: "The fundamental socio-economic element, the family or the household, is neither a homogeneous unit nor a statically alleged element. It is much more the resultant of the natural and social environment and, at the same time, underlies, among other things, the demands made upon it by this environment (E, p. 155). "The village structures are essentially characterised by the following facts:

- The rights of use for resources and income are distributed with the result of the relatively levelled structure of per capita income.
- This simultaneously leads, however, to a growing dependence of the poor on the wealthy.
- The utilization of resources is optimized. Without extensive changes in the conditions of the framework for activities and behaviour, there are hardly any possibilities left of altering/improving the system.
- In the long run, shared poverty and a growing pauperization results with (sic!) increasing mutual distrust.
- In general, a social fragmentation and "atomisation tendency" arises.
- Self-help and self-regulation is handicapped by a multitude of interventions.
- The effect of development measures stabilises the system without being able to solve the existing and resulting problems" (E, p. 164).

It is remarkable how the author develops his theoretical system (G) all by himself, almost without referring to other works in this field. Omission of the questionnaire may also be regretted. The study abounds with tables (G: 14 in the text and 118 in the appendix; E: 4 and 5), graphs and maps, not all of them totally conclusive, like the ones on "problems solved" (G, p. 408), theft (G, pp. 413 ff.), or the number of animals (G, p. 401, table 78) without any differentiation between draught animals and poultry. Not all the abbreviations are explained (G, p. 359), and for figures one might expect a comment on the fact that the age pyramid shows smaller numbers in the zero-to-five-years bracket than in the five-to-



ten-year age group (G, p. 34), which could either be the successful result of family planning (rather unlikely) or age mis-reporting in the census (not uncommon).

All in all, however, the study is a valuable contribution to understanding the rural exchange system not only of the country studied, providing an excellent insight into rural Bangladesh. It is recommended to economists, sociologists and anthropologists, especially those working on Bangladesh.

*Wolfgang-Peter Zingel*

**Florian Steinberg:** Die städtische Wohnungsfrage in Sri Lanka. Perspektiven der Wohnungspolitik für die Armen. Saarbrücken/Fort Lauderdale: Verlag Breitenbach 1982. 458 pp, DM 40.-

The book (the title of which recalls that of a famous collection of articles written around 1860 by Friedrich Engels on the housing situation of the British working class) is a fairly scholarly dissertation with a fine bibliography and more than 700 footnotes on 66 pages only.

It starts with a short description of the living conditions of the poor of Colombo based on the available relevant figures for the city and, in particular, for two small low-income quarters, a run-down workers' tenement complex and a squatter compound. Subsequently it summarizes the country's economic development and the resulting unbalanced distribution of population and wealth despite some welfare state efforts on the part of the government. The main section of the book is devoted to the topics more directly connected with housing: the construction sector of Sri Lanka, the land market of Colombo, the country-wide house construction programs and, in more detail, the low-cost housing, self-help and upgrading projects in Colombo itself. At the time of assessment, in 1981, only a few of these projects had been partly successful (transfer of land-ownership), others had more or less failed (construction), and many just stood on paper.

Since these data, although interesting in themselves, were not consistent enough for an evaluation of the country's housing policy in terms of inductive reasoning, the author chose, in order to come to an assessment at all, to switch to a kind of deductive argument. Instead of taking the facts presented he concluded from Marx' and Engels' quotations and neo-marxist views including those of his Ph. D. supervisors that a reformist housing policy, which may have inspired the one or the other of the low-income housing projects in Colombo, is principally unable to solve the housing problem of the poor. However, in the last paragraphs of his text, the author modifies his stand and declares that " – in view of the prevailing conditions – there are few operational alternatives to the reformist housing policies criticized above".

*Jürgen Oestereich*