

## INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF RURAL RECONSTRUCTION (IIRR)

The INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF RURAL RECONSTRUCTION (IIRR) was formally incorporated on October 20, 1960 in the United States of America, to “conduct and operate a non-profit school or schools in the Philippine Islands . . . to prepare men and women from the developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America to teach the peoples of these countries the information, skills and abilities necessary to combat poverty and disease and to develop self-reliance and self-government.” Its incorporators—William O. Douglas, Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court; John W. Leslie, industrialist; DeWitt Wallace, publisher of the *Reader’s Digest*; and Y.C. James Yen—were building upon an older movement, one whose roots stretched back to the tumultuous 1920s and 1930s in China, when young Chinese reformers sought to achieve solutions to rural problems based on the Christian spirit and democratic means.

The link between China and IIRR was James Yen (1960 International Understanding Awardee for “sharing the wealth of his experience and creative leadership in rural reconstruction in Asia”) who, as a young man in 1923, founded China’s Mass Education Movement. In the 1930s he initiated successful pilot programs in rural reconstruction which emphasized education, public health, economic improvement and self-government, an approach he called the Four-Fold Plan. By 1937 there were some 800 Yen-inspired rural reconstruction centers throughout China. Yen and his young admirers, most of them university graduates, some with doctorates, did the then extraordinary thing of teaching, working, eating, drinking and living with villagers.

By the late 1930s, even as Japan advanced steadily throughout China, Yen’s projects were being implemented by the Nationalist government in Hunan and Szechuan provinces. His College of Rural Reconstruction, founded in Pa-hsien County outside Chungking in 1940, was designed to train future leaders attuned to the needs of rural people. In 1948 the Joint (US-Chinese) Commission for Rural Reconstruction (JCRR), which Yen had been instrumental in persuading the

U.S. Congress to establish and which was based in large part on his ideas, allocated US\$1,000,000 of United States economic aid to his programs. These reached some 60,000,000 people before both Yen and the JCRR had to retreat before the communists to Taiwan.

Because the JCRR was an established body with experience and expertise, and the guiding force in the extraordinarily successful rural revolution taking place on Taiwan, Yen now shifted his attention to other needy areas. He enlisted sympathetic Americans to the reorientation of his movement on an international scale. In 1951 Eleanor Roosevelt (widow of President Franklin Roosevelt), Douglas, Pearl Buck (author with a long background in China) and Wallace joined Yen in expanding China's Mass Education Movement into the International Mass Education Movement (IMEM) and agreed to serve as members of its board.

Although the headquarters of IMEM was in the U.S., the first application outside of China became the Philippines. Here a predominantly agrarian, newly independent nation faced problems typical of much of Asia. Here, too, civic leaders were searching for a blueprint for reform which, in addressing squarely the causes of rural poverty and unrest, would defuse the more radical and violent solutions advocated by others.

The Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement (PRRM) was founded on July 17, 1952. Among those who lent their support to the PRRM and agreed to serve on its Board of Trustees were Dean Conrado Benitez, a prominent educator, banker and public servant who had met Yen at a YMCA conference in Hawaii in 1925 and who became PRRM's first president; Domingo Bascara, then General Secretary of the YMCA in the Philippines; and Manuel Manahan, a young progressive businessman, journalist and publisher, aspiring public servant and soon-to-be chairman of the PRRM board.

To carry out the day-to-day work they recruited a new generation of young, idealistic college graduates to become full-time rural reconstruction workers. To this day many of these pioneers still remember Yen's irresistible challenge as he addressed them in their colleges throughout the country.

The role and work of the PRRM fit in well with the aura of civic reform and public optimism sweeping the Philippines under Ramon Magsaysay, who was elected president in 1953. Its village level programs promoting public health, better farming, enhanced livelihoods and

democratic village councils spread quickly, collaborating with the government's rehabilitation program.

Observing the PRRM take hold and flourish in the Philippines as a wholly Filipino movement, Yen and the IMEM Board concluded that indigenous rural reconstruction movements could be initiated in a relatively short period of time. This emboldened them to reincorporate as the INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF RURAL RECONSTRUCTION.

The concept of IIRR as a research institution grew directly out of Yen's projects in China, especially the College of Rural Reconstruction in Bei Pei. Here he had developed the concept of the "social laboratory," the school working in direct consultation with field workers in the villages, and the laboratory being the villages themselves. The dialogue between theory and practice was a hallmark of the rural reconstruction movement, important not only because it generated new practical knowledge, but because it provided eager but inexperienced college graduates, who were usually the products of an urban upbringing, an opportunity to learn what village life is really like.

Based upon the success of the PRRM, the IIRR founders selected the Philippines as the most auspicious location for the INSTITUTE building, and in the years that followed a 52 hectare site was acquired in the town of Silang, in the then bandit-infested uplands of Cavite Province. Situated about an hour by car from both Manila and the College of Agriculture at Los Baños, it was close enough to these centers to obtain resource people, but distant enough for the centers not to be a distraction.

Initially IIRR workers received a hostile and at times violent reception, for Cavite villages had come to suspect *all* outsiders of being potential exploiters. But the workers patiently endured and continued preparing the site, fortified by the Tagalog saying that, "the best fence is friendship." Meanwhile Yen called upon his patrons in the U.S. for funds to construct the new campus, and the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. DeWitt Wallace, Mr. and Mrs. Ridley Watts and Dr. Wilbur G. Malcolm made it possible for construction to begin in 1965. By 1967 the campus was complete, and on May 2 it was formally inaugurated.

In the years following IIRR's inception Yen had encouraged the establishment of rural reconstruction movements in Colombia and Guatemala, helping his disciples form boards of trustees and solicit financial backing from local businessmen. In January 1965 teams sent by these two movements became the INSTITUTE's first international trainees—although the school itself had yet to be built. The curriculum

was developed by the staffs of PRRM and IIRR, working together, and was designed to prepare the participants to start an effective field program in their respective countries. It included training in agricultural improvement, cooperatives, village industries, literacy training, public health and, in keeping with the Four-Fold Plan, self-government. In short, IIRR trained the participants to be multipurpose rural reconstruction field workers, as well as effective supervisors and trainers of others.

The manual for this first course, *Rural Reconstruction and Development: A Manual for Field Workers*, became the IIRR training bible, and the course itself was succeeded by eight others during the next six years. Two of these trained the staff of the Thai Rural Reconstruction Movement (formed in 1967), the others, contract training courses with content modified to meet the specific needs of each group, instructed a variety of individuals and agencies interested in IIRR's philosophy and approach.

Although primarily committed to teaching field workers and their supervisors, IIRR soon responded to other calls for its expertise. In 1971 it conducted its first training course for a mixed class, which included missionaries, development planners, extension workers, social workers, and donors, and who came from 18 government and non-government agencies representing 11 countries. As its clientele expanded and became more heterogeneous, IIRR modified its curriculum accordingly. But its teaching philosophy remained essentially the same. What was taught in the classroom directly reflected the experiences of the field workers, and the final lesson for each trainee was a period of residence in a village, working side-by-side with a veteran field person. From 1965 to 1971 IIRR trained 178 people in courses of 11-18 weeks duration.

The 1970s, however, was a decade of general retrenchment for IIRR, as its financial support came gradually to rest less and less upon large personal donations from generous friends, and more and more upon the foundations that some of these same people had set up to carry on philanthropic work after their deaths. And the foundations themselves were paring their budgets. During the lean years of 1972 to 1977 IIRR conducted only two training courses, one for its new affiliate in Ghana (1973), the other for its Guatemalan, Colombian and Thai affiliates (1976). International training was not to flourish again until 1978 when IIRR's new president, Dr. Juan M. Flavier, moved dramatically to revitalize both curriculum and programs.

During the lean years the major thrust was the *Barangay* (Village)

Scholars Program, which trained local farmers to teach IIRR techniques and skills to their peers. Earlier development strategies, upon appraisal, proved to have leaned too heavily on intervention by energetic outsiders—IIRR field workers themselves, and the host of experts seconded by development agencies. These programs had been costly and all too often had failed to survive the departure of the initiators. For IIRR the Village Scholars Program represented a return to the basics. Its evolution within the social laboratory of Cavite provides an excellent illustration of the INSTITUTE's ongoing attempt to find approaches to rural reconstruction that are simple, practical, inexpensive and adaptable, and which are consonant with the IIRR's philosophy—"to learn from the people, plan with the people, start with what the people know."

The initial social laboratory for the Village Scholars Program consisted of 58 Cavite villages, and it was their captains who christened the new schooling scheme *paaralang anak-pawis*, a Tagalog phrase meaning "school for the children of sweat"—the word used for sweat in this case having an honorable connotation. The concept of the village scholar was simple: select a farmer and teach him one new technique; he in turn must teach it to five of his colleagues; they in turn should teach it to five more. In this fashion, the theory went, new techniques for growing rice, corn and vegetables; raising pigs, poultry and cattle; and providing safe toilets and cleaner water, would spread through the villages.

"A beautiful plan," recalls Flavier, "but it didn't work." The teaching pyramid broke down at the second level but, it was discovered, it worked well when the original trainee taught five others and they *together* instructed twenty-five more. Flavier recalls other modifications. The program worked best, for example, when villagers selected their own trainee, and especially when they were required to pay his modest expenses. When the program was free, officials sent their idle nephews and, in one case Flavier remembers, a village used the program to rid itself of a rowdy basketball team for a week. Having to pay, however, created a concern by the village that it get its money's worth; and the village commitment to take over the trainee's responsibilities while he was away created an attitude of "we are paying for your going, we are taking care of your farm while you are away, therefore you had better make good!" Few scholars become dropouts under these circumstances.

Furthermore, the difficulty of raising funds and assuming a trainee's responsibilities forced village leaders to prioritize their needs—e.g. papaya cultivation, water seal toilets, or a credit union—and choose the person most suitable for learning the desired technique.

Another lesson learned by IIRR was the importance of *where* the village scholar was trained. Practically speaking, scholars could be trained anywhere and the custom had been to assemble them in a village close to their homes, but experience showed that this was not psychologically sound. Part of the pride of being an alumnus was having been to the INSTITUTE itself. As a result, trainees receive at least one day of training at the Silang headquarters. Similarly, IIRR found that attempts to call scholars back for “continuing education” fell on deaf ears, but scholar alumni would attend “class reunions” happily. And such reunions have become forums for discussing problems among the staff and alumni.

Indeed, from such a reunion sprang one of IIRR’s most successful offshoots. The concept of the Cavite Farmers’ Feedmilling and Marketing Cooperative developed as a group of scholar alumni groused among themselves about the quality of animal feeds on the market—so often adulterated with corn cobs, rice husks or carabao dung. Therefore, as Flavier tells the story, they began to talk about mixing their own feed. To learn how to develop the right feed for their needs they called upon IIRR for training in everything from growing sorghum and caring for piggeries, to running meetings, taking minutes and keeping books. The organization grew in 10 years from its original 23 members to 400, and is doing a 16,000,000 *peso* (US\$800,000) business annually.

As it grew and changed in response to field experience, the Village Scholars Program gradually took on a more comprehensive character. It now involves the INSTITUTE, its field workers and trainers, and networks of alumni and *their* trainees, all of whom are interlocked with village councils and livelihood committees, as well as IIRR-initiated credit and marketing cooperatives. The latter in turn interact at various levels with international developmental organizations and with government agencies, both local and national. The program is now called the People’s School System.

There were other lessons to be learned during these formative years. Many well planned initiatives failed to take hold after an initial burst of enthusiastic participation. This was especially true of credit cooperatives. A study revealed at one point that of 44 village credit cooperatives started with PRRM assistance, only 4 were in existence five years later, a consequence, IIRR concluded, of focusing too much effort on training leaders and not enough on training members.

Infinitely more troubling was the realization that many IIRR initiatives benefited villagers who were already better off than their peers.

Small landowners were materially and more psychologically predisposed to take advantage of the new skills and techniques introduced by field workers. Village captains, council members and livelihood committee members were part of this group. However inadvertently, the truly poor were being bypassed. Confronting this problem became a key element of the INSTITUTE's plans as it embarked upon an expanded program in 1978 under its new president, Juan Flavier.

Flavier had been born in the slums of Manila in 1935, and passed his youth in the Mountain Province where his father, a labor organizer, was employed as a mechanic at the Balatoc Mining Company. He excelled in school, and by dint of his talent and determination, and his mother's enterprise—she sold used clothing to help pay for his education—he achieved his dream of becoming a doctor, receiving his MD from the University of the Philippines in 1960. After a year of teaching, and much to his mother's consternation, he eschewed a comfortable academic and medical career to join the Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement.

It was Yen who "ensnared" him. "Young man," he said to Flavier in 1960, "I am a foreigner, but I am trying to do something for your people. What are *you* going to do?" In April 1961 Flavier became, as he likes to say, "a doctor to the barrios."

In the years which followed, working with PRRM and the newly formed IIRR, Flavier combined medical service to the villages with the design and supervision of community health projects. He became chief of PRRM's Division of Health and in 1967 its acting president. In that year he was recognized as one of the Ten Outstanding Young Men of the Philippines. In 1969 he earned a Masters Degree in Public Health at Johns Hopkins University and upon returning from the United States, assumed the vice presidency of IIRR. In 1978 the Board of Trustees selected him to succeed Yen, who was retiring from the presidency at the age of 85. Since then, although faithfully navigating the INSTITUTE in the direction long charted by Yen, Flavier has been very much at the helm.

The new president immediately appointed a commission to examine the INSTITUTE's goals and to restate its mission. The commission articulated a two-fold agenda which built firmly upon its past. The first goal, which Flavier calls the vertical aspect of IIRR's mission, was strengthening the social laboratory itself, generating scientifically valid knowledge about rural development by working in the villages with the now specific focus upon identifying and helping the poorest members

of those communities. The second, the horizontal aspect, was sharing that knowledge through extension work and the International Training Program. The successful 1971 program which brought together a heterogeneous collection of participants became the model. Flavier summed up the restated agenda: "We are going to act locally, but think globally."

An essential element was documenting the experiences of field workers and publishing accounts and analyses of IIRR's successes and failures. "If we allow our experiences to die with us we will be reinventing the wheel all the time," Flavier reminded his colleagues. Recording and interpreting field experience was crucial to bringing the lessons of the social laboratory into the classroom, and yet surprisingly little of this had been done heretofore. Perhaps, the new president surmised, this was because most field workers, for whom English was a second language, were reluctant to try to write.

To solve this problem, Flavier pioneered a scheme in which he paired graduate students and other academicians interested in IIRR's work with field workers, on the understanding they study problems in which IIRR was interested and publish their findings. Since 1980 the reports have been appearing regularly in a series of working papers, conference proceedings, theses and books—many as official IIRR publications. They often appear in summary form in IIRR's magazine, *Rural Reconstruction Review*, which is distributed to affiliates and subscribers around the world; the *Review* also contains accounts of experiments conducted by affiliates. A sample issue from 1982—selected at random—takes up everything from livestock dispersal, women's organizations and using the radio in the People's School System, to articles on "Learning the Needs of the Landless" and "A Farmers Association that Failed."

IIRR also publishes easy-to-read manuals in the Filipino language: "Women Leaders," "Village Drugstore," "The Fuel Saving Stove," "Seven Tested Methods of Upland Rice Culture," to name a few. Its leaflets discuss problems such as "Pest Control in Your Garden," and its single concept sheets take up "Conserving Water in the Dry Season," "The 14-Day Method of Composting" and a host of other topics. Flavier continues to encourage his field workers to keep a log of their activities as an integral part of their daily routine.

Publications, however, take second place to the school itself as the major tool for disseminating IIRR's experiences in rural development. As of 1986 more than 616 individuals have been trained in one or



another of IIRR's programs. Many of these have followed special programs, tailored for contractees such as World Vision International; Christian Children's Fund; Outreach International; U.S. Peace Corps Volunteers; government officials from Thailand, Indonesia and Nepal; Canadian University Services Overseas, and the Voluntary Agencies Development Association of Kenya. But the backbone of IIRR's teaching program has been its basic senior level and middle level managers' courses.

Twice a year 25 to 30 middle level and senior managers in rural development programs and agencies in Asia, Africa and Latin America gather at the INSTITUTE's Silang campus for an intensive immersion in the cumulative wisdom of the rural reconstruction movement. The curriculum of both seminars includes units on the history and philosophy of rural reconstruction, still taught in part by Yen himself; strategies for working with peasants and the rural poor; project planning, execution and evaluation; and special sessions chosen by the participants on, for example, health, women, nonformal education and bio-intensive gardening. The courses emphasize skills in *working with*, as opposed to *working for*, rural people, and in motivating indigenous leaders. Consonant with IIRR's philosophy, the courses approach the issues of education, health, livelihood and self-government as interlocking.

Today's Senior Managers' Seminars are concerned with macro issues and trends in development; organizational and program management; comparative analyses of rural development agencies and programs; history and philosophy of rural reconstruction—its implications for current rural development approaches; and special interests as indicated by participants.

The Middle Level Managers' Course is devoted to history and philosophy of rural reconstruction; reflections on development; strategies and approaches in working with peasants; project planning, implementation and evaluation; village study and agency visits; health, women, nonformal education and other topics as identified by participants.

In both cases classroom sessions draw upon the lessons of practical experience and are complemented by visits to the field, with direct exposure to projects such as the People's School System. Finally participants spend a week living with a rural family. Making international training courses immeasurably richer is the fact that each of the

participants brings valuable experiences and insights of his own to the training and is encouraged to share his knowledge. At IIRR learning is a two-way street.

Typical of the participants were four members of the 1980 group. From Bangladesh came Monica Mondal, a nurse-midwife in charge of a community health center. Under her supervision the center had not only expanded its health services, which included family planning, immunization and nutrition education, but had begun to hold literacy classes for adults, livelihood clinics for women (showing them, for example, how to raise goats), and special programs for small children. Sriharto Brodjodarono, a lawyer from Indonesia, was sent by his country's Ministry of Manpower Development and Transmigration. He and his colleagues had been mandated to devise programs to utilize productively Java's millions who are unemployed during the agricultural off-season.

Sriharto had personally supervised more than 100 road, reservoir, irrigation and reforestation projects. A third participant, Ravadee Chaiyaparn, had been for eight years a field worker in the Thailand Rural Reconstruction Movement, promoting youth activities, credit unions, livelihood projects and choral groups. She was now attempting to foster village community development committees. And Jayant Patel came from India, bringing to the training seminar his more than 30 years of experience working among India's tribal minorities. During this time he had facilitated dramatic improvements in diet and livelihood by training villagers to graft fruit trees, cultivate fodder and raise fish, goats, chickens, pigs and bees. Mondal, Sriharto, Chaiyaparn and Patel illustrate the national and experience mix found in IIRR international training courses, and illustrate why meaningful cross-fertilization is possible.

The opportunity for cross-fertilization of ideas is one of the reasons government and non-governmental development and assistance agencies are willing to pay the not inconsiderable IIRR tuition costs. In 1986 charges for the four-week Senior Managers' Seminar was US\$1,800; for the six-week Middle Level Managers' Course, US\$2,500. Mondal and five other 1980 trainees were sponsored by the Asia Health Institute, a Japanese organization that trains South and Southeast Asian health workers; Sriharto and his colleagues attended on USAID fellowships, as do many from government organizations in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan and the Philippines. UNICEF, UNDP and FAO occasionally sponsor trainees, and several non-governmental international organizations send key staff members to IIRR's regular courses. These

include World Vision International, World Concern, Redd Barna, Save the Children Fund (US), Christian Children's Fund, Outreach International and Foster Parents Plan. The fact that IIRR's international training courses are now routinely oversubscribed permits the INSTITUTE to pick and choose whom it takes. It can thereby achieve a meaningful balance among nationalities and types of agencies represented, and can take more participants from indigenous rural development organizations of the sort from which the INSTITUTE itself emerged.

During the four or six weeks of training the participants study and live side-by-side on the Silang campus, sharing the modest accommodations of IIRR's dormitories and the camaraderie of the dining room, volleyball court and weekend outings. Evenings often find them gathered in nearby homes of the staff: indeed, "it is at five o'clock in the afternoon," says Flavier, "that the whole thing begins to be alive." The training is, in short, an intense interactive experience among like-minded people, and time has shown it to foster friendships and loyalties as well.

Eight countries now possess IIRR alumni associations—Ghana, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka. The latter four have banded together to form SARRA, the South Asia Rural Reconstruction Association. These groups now help recruit and select new training participants and spread the word about rural reconstruction in neighboring countries. They also constitute an important, formal part of IIRR's international network, through which the process of sharing goes on ever more vigorously as the network itself grows.

Rural reconstruction movements now exist in six countries. In addition to those which Yen helped to set up in the early 1960s in Colombia, Guatemala and the Philippines, the Ghana RRM was formed in 1972 by Dr. K. Ohene Ampofo; the Thai movement by Puey Ungphakorn (1965 Magsaysay Awardee for Government Service) and Snoh Nilkamhaeng in 1967; and the Indian in 1979 by Goturi N. Reddi, a sociologist and alumnus of IIRR International Training who calls upon the traditions of both Gandhi and Yen in promoting rural development in India. Although each affiliated movement adheres to the four-fold rural reconstruction philosophy, and a people-centered approach to development, each is fully autonomous and distinct, and evolves in accordance with a unique interaction between the IIRR approach on the one hand, and the local environment, culture and particular visions of its leaders on the other. Each has its own character and its own locally inspired priorities. The Guatemalan movement is known for its people's school, for ex-

ample, the Ghanaian for public health, and the Indian for its work with Untouchables.

The affiliate movements, however, participate actively in the IIRR network by using IIRR instructional materials and publications, and by making contributions to these from their own field work; periodically they freshen their ties with the INSTITUTE by sending staff members for training at Silang. In 1985 IIRR sponsored a three-day seminar for representatives of its affiliates to update one another on their respective field programs, and to discuss together their short and long term plan. The heads of each affiliate, as members of the IIRR Board of Trustees, gather at least once a year to participate in shaping the work and character of the parent organization. In these loosely structured ways IIRR enriches its affiliates and is enriched.

The Board of Trustees consists of Yen as Chairman, Flavier as President, the heads of the affiliated RRM's, and seven Americans who are supporters and patrons of the movement. Although mandated to meet twice a year, financial constraints now limit full board meetings to once a year; the Executive Committee, consisting of Flavier and the executive directors of the six affiliate movements, usually gathers three times. Generally the Board and the Executive Committee convene in New York where IIRR maintains its official international headquarters. Although there was a time when board members were inclined to defer without much deliberation to Yen, in recent years they have begun to play a more decisive role in shaping the organization. This is one evidence of the INSTITUTE's growing maturity.

Funding now comes from eight countries and, with the exception of grants from Canada and the United States, entirely from non-governmental sources. For example, Freedom from Hunger chapters in several European countries contribute on a regular basis. Major foundations—including Ford, Rockefeller, Henry Luce and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund—now support IIRR's work. In addition the INSTITUTE can still count upon the generosity of many private donors. Government funding from the U.S. is through AID which has been providing fellowships for international training courses for six years. The INSTITUTE also earns money from its contracted international training programs and from coffee cultivated on its Silang campus.

A recent innovation in IIRR's educational program has been the introduction of collaborative training sessions outside the Philippines. Two years of network building and careful preparation led, in 1985, to two courses being conducted in Indonesia in collaboration with Indone-

sia's two largest private training organizations, Bina Swadaya and Yayasan Indonesia Sejahtera, both of which had previously sent senior staff members to the INSTITUTE. The two four-week training courses were conducted in Indonesian. To help organize and present the first course, IIRR sent its Training Director and three staff members; the second course went smoothly with only one IIRR consulting trainer present. These collaborative training courses were designed to improve the performance of Indonesia's middle level development planners and managers and to smooth the linkages between government and non-government agencies in carrying out development projects among the rural poor. Their success prompted two more. To date 75 Indonesians have been thus trained.

IIRR missions to East Africa in 1983 and 1984 led to another series of collaborative training courses in 1985 and 1986 in Kenya in cooperation with the Voluntary Agencies Development Assistance. In 1986 IIRR was also asked to come to Sri Lanka by Ahangamage Tudor Ariyaratne, 1969 Magsaysay Community Leadership Awardee for the "founding and guidance of the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement, combining voluntary service to villages with awakening of man's best instincts." With the 25,000 workers in 8,000 villages, Ariyaratne felt the need for more worker training. The IIRR team spent two months in Sri Lanka and trained 60 personnel in the techniques of structuring a training program based on local needs. SARRA, the South Asian association, now conducts annual Regional Leadership Training based on IIRR's model with IIRR staff participation, and IIRR is currently supporting its Thai alumni in doing the same. In such ways as these the INSTITUTE's influence has begun to spread throughout the developing world.

IIRR's work in international education and as a clearing house for effective development strategies has grown, but the organization nonetheless strives to keep close to its original spirit and philosophy—to learn from doing, and to teach from the lessons learned in the field social laboratory. It calls upon the collective experience of its affiliates throughout the world and keeps abreast of the latest relevant knowledge available from every credible source, and at the same time continuing to invest the lion's share of its efforts in its own social laboratory.

Efforts to reach and help the truly poor among Philippine villagers are in the forefront of the INSTITUTE's endeavors—helping the landless and near landless peasants who depend on subsistence enterprises to survive. IIRR field workers have been introducing the concept of non-collateral group loans to fund new income-generating activities such as small-scale trading, produce marketing and village manufacturing.

Group loans require loan recipients to organize themselves for a specific purpose and to assume responsibility *as a group* for repaying the loan, a strategy which has not only encouraged new forms of economic cooperation among the very poor but discouraged defaulting. One such group of 20 families in San Miguel, Cavite, now carries on a cooperative buy-and-sell business in vegetables, fish, eggs, cigarettes and soft drinks. IIRR has also prevailed upon existing IIRR-connected organizations to “let the poor in,” and has experimented with a low-cost, indigenous porridge mix for malnourished infants and small children.

Cavite field workers are also busy introducing and testing what promise to be economically inexpensive techniques (such as bio-intensive gardening, solar weeding using plastic bags, and the cultivation of *azolla*, a nitrogen-fixing water fern), and the use of herbal medicines. They also experiment with teaching health awareness and livelihood skills using folk media such as comics and *balagtasan* (verse debate). In some cases of tenant eviction, workers have helped the poor assert their legal rights. As Cavite’s rural population comes increasingly under the impact of an expanding metropolitan Manila, this type of problem will have to be faced more frequently in the future.

Two newly opened project areas are in the economically distressed regions of Bicol (a cultural-linguistic area of southern Luzon and offshore islands) and Negros. The Bicol Project began several years ago when IIRR contracted with the government’s Local Resource Management Project to initiate a thorough-going rural reconstruction program in the destitute villages of Santo Domingo, Albay Province. The idea, recalls Flavier, was to forge a closer working relationship between the local government and the rural poor.

Ten newly recruited field workers had already undergone months of training at IIRR in preparation for the project when Mount Mayon volcano erupted, spilling a thick layer of ashy mud over many of the pilot villages. “Overnight we became a relief organization,” recalls Flavier, who dispatched his workers to evacuation centers where they assisted the displaced villagers and began the difficult process of preparing them to return to damaged and destroyed homes and farmlots. Their draft animals were dead, fruit trees damaged, water supplies contaminated and fields smothered under sludge. In addition to helping coordinate the flow of relief goods and services, IIRR’s workers engaged in intensive “social preparation and awareness building sessions” so that villagers could *themselves* identify their needs, prioritize them, and seek ways—within their means—of achieving them.

Villagers were encouraged, for example, to organize themselves into working groups. This led to group-organized and IIRR-facilitated projects in home construction, the introduction of substitute crops, the formation of credit and marketing cooperatives, and group borrowing from IIRR to purchase new work animals.

The working groups gave the highest priority to the construction of a safe and reliable water supply system. Local Resource Management staffers and IIRR field workers helped them achieve this goal by showing them how to form village sub-groups around potential well sites, conduct feasibility studies, construct new hand-pumped, village-dug wells and operate them according to mutually agreed upon rules and by-laws. Each well-group was required to raise P200, after which IIRR and the government between them supplied P1,000. Seven well-groups purchased the necessary materials, dug their own wells, and installed their own pumps. After six months one of the wells went dry, but the others now supply 86 families with dependable, potable water. To pay for upkeep and maintenance, each member pays a small monthly fee; non-members pay more. The well project conformed to IIRR doctrine that village projects should be simple, practical, inexpensive and replicable. The National Economic and Development Authority of the Philippines now mandates that hand-powered, village-installed pumps of the type introduced in the Bicol area be used throughout the Philippines.

IIRR field workers have been active in the Bicol area since September 1984 and their efforts there brought to light another complex and essential aspect of rural development today: that working effectively in the village requires collaboration and negotiation, and often a constant exchange, with government agencies, their staffs and local extension workers, and frequently with private organizations as well. These groups may not be of like mind about a problem nor of commensurate wisdom or experience. Nor are they likely to be in command of similar financial resources. IIRR field workers and their supervisors, therefore, must learn to act politically and negotiate useful accommodations among themselves, other assistance agencies and the authorities. They must also constantly define and redefine their role as catalysts for change in complex socio-economic circumstances where all too often one man's dearth is another man's bounty.

Recently, for example, IIRR field workers helped coastal fishermen launch a formal protest against the violation of their traditional coastal fishing grounds by seagoing trawlers. As an international organization IIRR does not initiate such actions but, as in this case and that of the Cavite tenants, circumstances have sometimes compelled it to provide

the means—knowledge and appropriate organizational skills—to achieve the desired ends.

The crisis on Negros—center of the Philippine sugar industry and, since the collapse of sugar prices in 1980, a locale of rapidly deteriorating physical and economic health—has received the attention of many government ministries and agencies, Catholic and Protestant churches, and national and international philanthropic and humanitarian organizations. IIRR entered Negros at the invitation of UNICEF, which had responded to the need for emergency food on the island by setting up a network of feeding centers, but which hoped to develop food self-sufficiency. For this purpose it invited IIRR to become a major collaborator.

The INSTITUTE came forth with a comprehensive program to introduce bio-intensive, no-investment gardening. Bio-intensive gardening relies upon hardy indigenous food crops, cultivated intensively in small backyard plots without using fertilizers or pesticides. When properly balanced it can provide a year-round protein and vitamin rich diet for a family of five (30 percent of needed protein; 60 percent of Vitamin A; and 100 percent of Vitamin C and iron), virtually without cost. It had been tested systematically and found effective in different regions of the Philippines (including IIRR's own experimental gardens at Silang) and in other countries. IIRR's field workers are seeking to introduce the concept of such gardens to thousands of families, paying special attention to some 3,000 families with malnourished children who are enrolled in UNICEF's supplementary feeding programs. They also hope to train 100 villagers to become teachers and promoters of bio-intensive gardening among their neighbors.

To support these activities IIRR is introducing, or reintroducing, 100 indigenous vegetable varieties which perform well without costly chemical fertilizers; establishing a seed multiplication program for these vegetables aimed at reaching 50,000 families within a year and a half; and training 50 teachers to start school gardens. These actions, it is hoped, will prevent the repetition of Negros' catastrophic food crisis.

IIRR today comprises 160 full-time personnel, including its senior staff of doctors, agronomists, teachers and other specialists. The Silang campus is the nerve center of all IIRR operations, housing its library, its publications office and its research wing where computer-tabulated evaluations monitor IIRR projects. It is here, in the offices and along the corridors of its handsome and immaculate administration buildings, in its classrooms and conference halls, in its casual dining room, and on



paths meandering through fecund gardens, that the day-to-day process of discussing and analyzing the lessons of the social laboratory take place and become translated into revised curricula and innovative projects.

Forty-five of IIRR's employees are full-time field workers, college graduates rigorously trained at the center and sent into the field for terms of at least two years; the average stay is four. Selection is very competitive. For the Negros project IIRR chose 10 from among 50 applicants. Field workers serve in teams designed to tap their complementary specialties. Ideally these teams reflect IIRR's commitment to the Four-Fold Plan—for example, a midwife (health) works with an agriculture specialist (livelihood), a teacher (education) and a community organizer (self-government)—although in practice it is, of course, less perfect. Team members meet once a week to share experiences and to coordinate their activities. For IIRR these meetings constitute the first and most intimate arena for evaluating and analyzing projects and attempting to wed theory to practice. Field workers, living patiently and flexibly among villagers, are still the heart of the INSTITUTE's approach to rural reconstruction.

Although this approach continues to adhere to the basic concepts of its founder, the doctrines of Yen, like all doctrines, are subject to new interpretations by his disciples and successors. And this is as it should be. Flavier and his colleagues are not ideologues. They are idealists but very pragmatic ones. Listening to them discuss IIRR's mission one is likely to hear as much about what has gone wrong as what has gone right. "Come to us," Flavier urges, not wholly in jest, "because we know all the failures."

Yet James Yen's insights into rural poverty have proven durable. As passed along in simple maxims his ideas remain a touchstone to IIRR's new generation of leaders who, as jurists to law and theologians to scripture, invoke them as valued points of reference in addressing each new problem and each new opportunity. They reflect the observable truths: that effective change must occur at a personal level—"Go to the people," says Yen; and change cannot proceed beyond the capabilities and motivation of its intended beneficiaries—"Start with what the people know." For society to change, the people themselves must change; an agency seeking change must work patiently as a motivator. This is the unwelcome truth often overlooked by earnest and well-intentioned development planners whose comprehensive, scientifically-designed schemes have so disappointedly come up short or gone awry.

Thus the most important lesson of the social laboratory is, as IIRR reminds us constantly: "Outsiders can help, but insiders must do the job."

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Interviews with Juan M. Flavier and other members of the Board of Trustees and staff of IIRR, and with those acquainted with IIRR and its work. Visits to the IIRR campus in Silang, Cavite, Philippines.

