Editorial

This issue of the Journal continues the ongoing debate around the issues of integration and participation in development. Both these issues are seen as critical elements in the development process. The first four articles in this issue of the Journal in one way or another develop both of these themes, though in relation to the particular topics under discussion, namely relief-development strategies, social forestry, voluntary agencies and 'appropriate' development.

Reading through these articles raised in my mind a number of questions about what we actually mean by these words, particularly in relation to what they mean at the level of the grassroots people themselves. How often does integration mean integration and coordination among ministries, departments and NGOs, and does not include the people themselves? How often do we talk about participation meaning only that we will 'consult' the people, sell an idea to them, or (even worse) simply expect them to provide labour on projects that the local administration or central government bureaucracy have decided are required in a certain area? How often does participation mean capacity building among local communities, and leaving them with the 'control' over decisions that affect them (while also recognising the integration of local and national development needs and processes)? Too often, it would seem, development refers to a maintenence of the status quo position, where local communities have the level and order of their participation mapped out for them from outside the community. This is in opposition to an approach which recognises that communities can take responsibility for transforming their lives, and deciding on the nature of their participation and contribution, in terms of their understanding of their world and the larger world around them. Development as transformation and democratisation requires that much more trust be given to local communities, perhaps at the expense of the power of local and national bureaucracies. These are issues that require more discussion and, even more importantly, more reflection on practice in the field.

Hay's very interesting article, "Food, Aid and Relief-Development Strategies" contributes to this debate in the context of famine relief. He argues, very cogently, for the building of local household and community capacity in the context of relief, including food aid, strategies. His thesis is that the devastating ongoing effects of famine are a result of inadequate and unstabilised household incomes, and therefore to overcome ongoing famine it is necessary to build the capacity of local households and communities to increase their income and to withstand fluctuations in income. Of particular interest in Hay's paper is the delineation of a number of criteria which can be used to assess the success of famine relief programmes, in terms of not only how far they provide relief from human suffering but also the extent to which they contribute to household and community investment. Further identification of programmes in Africa which have tried to do this would be an important contribution to future planning for famine relief and development.

The Muir and Casey article, "Institutional Responsibility for Social Forestry in Africa: Lessons from Zimbabwe", also reflects on these issues of integration and participation. They make an argument for the definition and use of 'appropriate' institutional structures to combat the widespread deforestation in much of Africa. This implies using institutions that are most in touch with ordinary peasant farmers (eg rural development and extension agencies, including, possibly especially, agricultural extension agents) and working with them regularly, rather than commercial forestry structures which are unable to access local farming systems. Of particular interest are their comments on identifying people's need for wood, as the commonly accepted understanding of the need for fuelwood may not be the priority for local people. They call for an holistic, integrated and multi-use approach to tree-planting and rural afforestation.

Eziakor, in his article "Rethinking Third World Development", ends with a plea for a new and appropriate development paradigm. This he defines as people-centred and need oriented as well as ecologically sustainable. He echoes Schumacher's view that development must start with "people and their education, organisation and discipline."

The themes of participation and integration are continued in Osei-Hwedie's article on "Voluntary Agencies and the Promotion of Mental Health". He echoes the need to make "wiser" and more effective use of all human resources and potential, by returning responsibility for making institutions effective to the people and the community to be served, in this case through the use of volunteers and voluntary agencies (though he does not go to the next logical step, the mental patients themselves!). He recognises the important roles that such voluntary agencies do and must play in providing and developing social support services and in community responsibility for these services.

The last article, and the comment on it, in this issue refers to an article published in Vol 3 No 1 (1988) of this Journal, "Social Science in Africa: Problems and Prospects". In the article "Misconceptions on the role of the Social Sciences" (which is a revised version of the reply originally submitted to the Journal and read by Bloom), Pearce, as a philosopher, takes issue with the sociologist/social scientist view of Bloom in the original article. Pearce argues that social scientists cannot claim any special privileged position in society with respect to their skills or knowledge, and therefore do not have anything special to offer for their assumed role of social critic. The debate on the place and role of the social sciences in Africa is an important one which deserves more discussion and reflection on practice and possibilities. However, this debate needs to take place in an atmosphere of listening and respect. While the subject may, and possibly should, generate great passion, argument at an emotive and personal level detracts from the usefulness of this debate in terms of taking understanding forward. If other readers of the Journal wish to contribute to this debate we may be able to view it from a number of different perspectives and so increase our understanding of the role that the social sciences, and the social scientist, can play in national development in Africa.