The Momentum of Structures, Institutions, and Current Policies

When, after many efforts, a legislator succeeds in exercising an indirect influence upon the destiny of nations, his genius is lauded by mankind, while, in point of fact, the geographical position of the country, which he is unable to change, a social condition which arose without his co-operation, customs and opinions which he cannot trace to their source, and an origin with which he is unacquainted exercise so irresistible an influence over the courses of society that he is himself borne away by the current after an ineffectual resistance. Like the navigator, he may direct the vessel which bears him, but he can neither change its structure, nor raise the winds, nor lull the waters that swell beneath him.

Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America

The analysis so far has focused on the global and long-term development of agriculture, especially modern industrial agriculture. The logic of contextual analysis also requires an examination of how structures and institutions at the national and international level shape, channel, or distort policy making. The influence and momentum of these structures and institutions needs to be understood if we are to appreciate how we got where we are as well as to make a realistic assessment of how alternative policies might be pursued. The emphasis in what

K. A. Dahlberg, Beyond the Green Revolution
© Plenum Press, New York 1979
follows is on the developing countries—the recipients of the green revolution—and upon the types of influences that shape their decisions.

THE DECISION-MAKING CONTEXT OF NATIONAL ELITES

The long-term or evolutionary forces with which the decision maker finds himself confronted can be described in general terms, but it is difficult, if not impossible, to trace their specific influence on particular policy questions. As argued in the preceding chapters and as traced out in Arnold Toynbee's work on civilizations, it is most important to know the interactions and relationships between nature, man's modifications of it, and the basic social structures of groups of civilizations. However, at this point, we need to examine the influences, processes, structures, and institutions that operate at the level of the developmental time-frame. Although neglected in much of the literature on economic development, the most prominent of these—cultural influences, political-administrative influences, and external Western influences on elites—are of basic importance and can be traced with some precision.

Cultural Influences

Although there is no clear agreement on definitions, it would appear that the concept of culture fits the developmental time-frame more appropriately than the evolutionary one. This is because discussion of specific cultures or changes in the culture of individual coun-

1See Arnold J. Toynbee, A Study of History (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948–1961). Care must be used to avoid some of the Western biases associated with the term civilization.

2Analyzing various concepts in terms of the different time-frames would be most useful in clarifying ambiguities and sorting out competing definitions. On the one hand, there would be the question of what the most appropriate concepts are for a given time-frame. On the other, there is the question of whether a particular concept silently shifts from one time-frame to another as it is applied to specific situations. The various concepts of culture are particularly subject to this silent shell game, and the contrasting definitions of anthropologists like Leslie White, Julian Steward, Marshall Sahlins, Elman Service, and Marvin Harris would all benefit from attempts to relate them to specific time-frames and units of analysis.