Introduction

This chapter reviews the main debates on development in general and rural development in particular, and provides a theoretical framework to explain the process of rural development and the changes that occur in rural society as a consequence of rural development programmes. The discussion is organised into three sections. The first deals with modernisation theory and agricultural modernisation. It examines how changes occur and the strategies that can be used to lead the process in the desired direction. The second section traces the history of development and rural development theories and approaches from the 1950s to the early 1990s, and examines the nature of rural change with reference to developmental experiences over the decades. The final section considers the direction of rural transformation through an analysis of topics such as poverty and inequality in rural communities.

Modernisation

According to modernisation theory, all societies are either traditional or modern, and the former will change into the latter (Moore, 1963). Modernisation has been defined as the transformation from traditional stability to ‘certain desired sorts of technology and associated social structure, value-organisation, motivations, and norms’ (Dube, 1992, p. 112). During the process of transformation, societies abandon their traditional features and take on the characteristics of modern advanced societies, usually those typified by the industrialised West (Lerner, 1958; Eisenstadt, 1966; Harrison, 1988; Dube, 1992). This dichotomy of social types is also used to explain differences and changes within a
particular social sector (Boeke, 1953). The characteristics of traditional societies are seen as hindering the process of modernisation, and therefore need to be changed to allow the growth and predominance of universal achievement norms, a high degree of social mobility, a well-developed employment system, an egalitarian class structure based on generalised patterns of occupational achievement, and the prevalence of ‘associations’ or ‘functionally specific’, ‘non-ascriptive structures’ (Sutton, 1966; see also Lerner, 1958; Eisenstadt, 1966).

Modernisation theory has largely focused on the ‘new’ nation states, and tends to assume that what occurred in the West can be repeated elsewhere, with a little help in the way of capital, technology, expertise and rationality (Rostow, 1960). This assumes that developed countries have reached perfection in terms of social structures and cultural processes, whereas developing countries have yet to realise their potential in terms of adopting the ‘developed’ forms and states of being of the modernised countries (Luke, 1990). Third World societies will eventually become mirror images of the West, and consequently societies will tend to become homogeneous. As Levy (1967, p. 207) states, ‘as time goes on, they and we will increasingly resemble one another ... because the patterns of modernisation are such that the more highly modernised societies become, the more they resemble one another’. This will result from the metrocentric characteristic of modernisation, which is based on technological innovations first developed in the West. The technological factor will generate common cultural, economic and sociopolitical functions and structures that will join the ‘metropolitan’ (the industrialised and developed) with the ‘peripheral’ (the underdeveloped) nations.

The modernisation process was experienced by Western countries ‘organically’ (Sugar, 1964) as a consequence of the long-term evolutions of different aspects of these societies, such as the disintegration of feudalism, the growth of trade, the scientific revolution, religious reform, the commercialisation of agriculture and the growth of manufacturing.

Modernisation of the developing nations, which have not experienced this organic historical process, can take place through coercion (Luke, 1990), ‘induced development’ (Sugar, 1964) or ‘planned development’ (Long, 1979) by external forces such as international agencies by means of economic and technological aid or by national elites through policy initiatives that stimulate and create the necessary changes to achieve modernisation. As Luke (1990) argues, the entire thrust of the language used in the modernisation debate is that mod-