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Contribution of Professor Peter Rieder and agricultural economics at ETH to capacity building for international development

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Swiss development cooperation has strong roots in agriculture and rural development, since its technical assistance was largely based on Swiss know-how and expertise in this area with emphasis on livestock and dairy development. In its early days, Swiss development cooperation relied very much on practitioners with hands on experience in areas such as cattle management and breeding, fodder and dairy production, and the transformation of milk (cheese in particular). This was a natural choice and Switzerland could share much of its experience and achievements. The long term engagement of Switzerland in these fields in countries and regions such as India, Bhutan, Nepal or the Andes enabled SDC to build up very close relationships with key partners and actors in the South. With the development of capacities of local practitioners, Switzerland shifted its assistance towards more institutional cooperation, thus complementing the practical part of its engagement. There was also a move from a focus on agricultural production and processing towards entire commodity chains and marketing of agricultural products. This led, naturally, to economic considerations at the level of producers (micro) and markets (meso), to agricultural policy issues at the macro level.

To mirror this on the human capacities side, Swiss development cooperation had a large number of professionals in agriculture working either with NGOs such as Helvetas, Intercooperation or the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), which is under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Based on development economics studies, clearly identifying agriculture as engine of growth, and rural development as the cornerstone towards modernisation, in this context, Prof. Rieder set up an International Group at the Institute of Agricultural Economics (IAE/IAW/IER) to conduct research in development economics. This

¹ The views expressed by the authors in this article do not necessarily reflect those of SDC.

was a response to the growing needs of Swiss and international development agencies, and to the needs of developing countries. Discussions were initiated between the International Group at IAE, under the leadership of Dr. Urs Egger and Swiss development cooperation agencies, in particular SDC's Agricultural Service led by M. Paul Egger. Little by little, Prof. Rieder and his staff were able to demonstrate the need to supplement the production emphasis with economic considerations such as profitability of production improvements, livelihood considerations at the farming communities' level or marketing and commercialisation issues. In addition, Prof. Rieder and his group saw the opportunities in building up international linkages with top competence centres such as the research institutes of the Consultative Group for International Agriculture (CGIAR) and foreign universities both in the North (e.g. USA, Germany) and in the South (e.g. Sri Lanka). The discussions with SDC were not always easy, but SDC was also undergoing changes based on its experiences on the ground and on developments at the CGIAR of which SDC is a donor. The importance of agricultural economic and sociological aspects became evident and led to a mandate given by SDC to IAE for backstopping and advising agricultural projects

With the collapse of communism and the opening of Eastern Europe in the 1990s, the International Group at IAE rapidly started working on economies in transition in particular in Eastern Europe, where agriculture and the farming community was in need of guidance and fundamental reorientation. This geographical addition completed the comprehensive and stimulating portfolio covered by P. Rieder's group, which ranged from Swiss agriculture, economies in transition, and developing countries' agricultural economic and policy issues.

During these years (1980's but mainly 1990's), P. Rieder underpinned this evolution by adding new topics and strengthening the international content of his lectures for undergraduate students. New course books were produced to provide updated quality documentation for the students. In all these undertakings P. Rieder was strongly supported by U. Egger and the International Group. This also provided a broader outlook to students and nurtured their interest for international and developing countries' topics, enabling them to more easily enter the international and development work market.

On the research side, studies were prepared and published by the International Group under P. Rieder's supervision. Several dissertations were undertaken on agricultural development and transformation issues in the South and the East. A good number of PhDs built upon studies

undertaken by students/researchers working abroad in CGIAR centres (the two first authors of this paper for instance), in other centres such as the Swiss centre for scientific research (the third author of this paper), with Swiss development partners (Novartis Foundation, Helvetas, SDC), or with academic institutions or governments in the South (Sri Lanka, Bhutan). This allowed a broad build up of knowledge and experiences around the world, a large network for research and teaching exchange, and the inclusion and collaboration with students and academics from the South. A very important achievement and foresight of P. Rieder is his support for interdisciplinary work: several of his PhD graduates are not agricultural economists, but come from other disciplines (e.g. crop production, the two latter authors of this article graduated in food technology) or are linked to other disciplines (e.g. the first author of this article graduated in livestock health and production). IAE was able to substantially contribute to enhancing the analytical quality of work undertaken by Swiss development partners, through backstopping of development projects (Eastern Europe and India in particular), various consulting missions and through capacity development of researchers, development workers and policy makers (Nicaragua, Eastern Europe, East Africa). This type of collaboration provided the needed links between academic and operational work and was sustained by capacity building efforts.

This, however, did not mean shying away from more analytical economics: Prof. Abdulai from Ghana, who worked for several years in the IAEs International Group, provided the rigorous methodological fundamentals required for high quality research, both through his lectures and research. This enabled the IAE to publish in some of the most prestigious journals and to collaborate with top ranking academic institutions. Academic exchanges of visiting researchers and professors from and to the IAE further strengthened capacity building.

One of the most visionary achievements, although hard fought, was the creation at the ETH of the Swiss Centre for international Agriculture (ZIL). The idea of ZIL emerged from the collaboration between the IAE/ETH and SDC, in light of the international agricultural research scene, and the CGIAR in particular. P. Rieder, who was the first president of ZIL, had the vision and courage to invest IAEs resources and embark on negotiations with SDC's agricultural service, other agricultural departments at the ETH and ETH management. The staff from the IAE International Group and ZIL contributed significantly to shape this vision and to make it become reality, uniting various forces and disci-

plines. ZIL, in fact captures several key elements of P. Rieder's vision towards capacity building for development: links to international competence centres, interdisciplinary research for operational work, global issues in relation to local outcome, feeding back experiences and research findings into teaching.

Prof. Rieder leaves an important development legacy in terms of former students from Switzerland and developing countries working in key positions in several countries of the world, in institutions dealing with development such as international organisations (FAO, CGIAR), in Swiss development agencies (Swisscontact, SDC), in the private sector (development consultants, multinationals in the South), in the academic world (Germany) etc.

Through this article we hope to have captured some of the major elements of P. Rieder's contribution to development and wish to thank P. Rieder for the opportunities he has offered us and his legacy.

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