

## SOCIAL SYMBIOSIS IN COMMUNITY DYNAMICS: A REPORT ON THE TANAMÁ WORKCAMP PROJECT

### PART I: BRIEFING AND TENTATIVE PLANNING

#### BRIEFING ABOUT ADJUNTAS

ADJUNTAS lies on the central northern slope amidst a charming hilly region, some 2,400 feet above sea-level. Temperature is subtropical, about 68° F. Rainfall, very heavy; above 85 inches. Soils are very varied but consistently deep, hence fitted for the cultivation of coffee, bananas and oranges, usually in small farms.

Adjuntas, with a 66 square mile area, is one of the least peopled towns. The region has very few roads. The place has low holding power on population, yet it has characteristics which call for isolation and stagnation. Rural in character, it has practically no industrial development.

## TANAMÁ IN BRIEF PERSPECTIVE

Tanamá is one of the farthest barrios of Adjuntas —7 to 8 miles from the town proper. It rains almost constantly. Cialitos and Guineo, clay soil-types. Scant transportation. About 1,120 persons actually living; its population, a young one, about 60% are 19 years of age or less; a small labor force, specially of men.

Economic insecurity injects a high degree of mobility —internally and externally; there is a noticeable exodus of working males to the United States. Indeed, the living families show a tendency to stay in the barrio, about 53% having had a permanent residence. Families are big, a mean of 5.7 members per family, although some reach as high as 25 and 28 persons.

The educational attainment of Tanamians is very low, about 40% is illiterate (a good number of which, about two thirds, are too young to go to school). About half have no more than an elementary education. Siblings, indeed, show a good index of school attendance —quite a future promise and a present community resource to work with.

Attitudes are vital psychosociological frames of reference of personal and community social or asocial action. Tanamian parents consider their off-spring as an economic asset —children should pay afterwards for the service of having been reared. School attendance is handicapped —by rain, distance and the above mentioned attitude. A little education, no education at all, or a sound education for their children is not a primary concern to parents.

Lack of working opportunities is felt —male occupations are within the coffee crop and female occupations, basically in their own homes. There is no steady employment throughout the year. Two alternatives are: to live at subsistence level, or to move to a sugar cane area. The majority stay and loaf around. The 196 families are classified within the low income brackets; highest incomes are among farmers who own their lands and the very low incomes among the “parceleros” and

“agregados”. Half of the families have \$10 or less, weekly, and most families are big ones! The principal sources of income are wages (for half of the families) and agricultural products.

Low income predicates bad living conditions. Electric power is lacking, except in Land Authority parcels. Running water is also lacking in Tanamá; about 70% of the families go to the streams. A high percentage lacks sanitary facilities for the disposal of wastes: nearly 42% do not have any, and most of the “letrinas” that are used are not adequate. The general attitude is “wait for the Government to build them.”

Homes are scattered throughout the area covered by farms more than are those in parcels area. Most are built by the owners; the materials thatch, wood and cardboard. No cement houses. Most of these homes call for urgent repairs, but Tanamians have other needs to attend first. Out of the 192 homes, 115 are small ones, although all face the problem of over-crowding which tends to bring moral problems into family relations.

One “muda” of clothes is the usual possession; most children go barefooted, but not so with the men. Toys are non-existent for children. Personal possessions: only those things strictly needed, though often, they have less. Home possessions, likewise, very few with regards to chairs, tables, benches, cooking utensils, eating utensils, and beds. Special spoon, fork and knife—for the possible visitor.

Really, the standard of living is very low, and in such aspects as nutrition, they get a low food rationing.

Tanamá has a rural, agricultural economy. Life revolves around the production of coffee; of the 1,633 acres under cultivation, 1,455 are devoted to it. In this region we find mostly small land-owners (47), “parceleros” (89), “agregados” (46), in farm tenancy and exploitation. The “agregados” show the worst of economic insufficiency. The working period—the period of activity—is of a very short duration: November to February about 4 months or less.

The land is very steep and shows a marked washing of its

top-soil; of its total 3,625 acres, 2,333 show a severe soil erosion. The land use shows that the bigger the farm the larger the income accrued from commercial production. But this tendency perpetuates: the "parceleros" and small farmers use almost all their lands for the support of their families; seldom can they indulge in the production of agricultural products for sale.

Class stratification, though not rigid, is found in Tanamá based on economic grounds—primarily, the possession of land. In the lower class, we find the great bulk of the inhabitants. The traditional Spanish patterns of folk-ways and customs are still observed. The peculiar paternalistic pattern is seen between bosses and subordinates, developing a reciprocal degree of confidence between them.

The family make-up pattern follows the patriarchal type, with its formal relationships between husband and wife and a respectful approach between parents and offspring; the children have their interrelations within a companionship atmosphere. Males are considered an economic asset; females, a burden. Courtship patterns are severe and unchallenged. Recreations revolve around the "fiestas de velorios", when a person dies; and the "promesas" on Christmas, New Year and Three Kings holidays.

Life at Tanamá is very simple. Isolation prevails, but its people are hospitable and sincere. Dodging a hard life as best they can, they are good natured and very sensible to human values.

#### SUGGESTED FUTURE LINES OF ACTION

The Extension Service has prepared a Farm and Home Program for Tanamá. This agency has synthesized the basic problems of the region, which is a help in thinking about lines of action for the "community", civic organizations, government agencies, sponsors, and persons interested in bringing up Ta-

namá—both materially and spiritually. Likewise, we can find suggestions in the study made by Edme V. Ruiz Torres, under the auspices of the Social Science Research Center of the University of Puerto Rico. And also, in the letters about the Tanamá Project between Mr. Milton Cobin, Special Assistant to the Chancellor, and Dr. William W. Biddle, Director of Community Dynamics, Earlham College.

What activities can be developed in the next summer work-camp? Considering the work and activities already done, initiated and oriented by Dr. Biddle and his associates, I think that there are some fields demanding immediate action: the improvement of homes and equipment, and the health and nutrition fields.

1. *Betterment of home and equipment:*

The betterment of homes and their equipment is a primary need in Tanamá. Efforts must be directed to help families to repair their houses and home equipment. This activity will afford construction projects for our female campers. It calls for aid from home demonstrators and field agents, from Extension Service in the organization and direction of Future Home Ladies Clubs, clubs organized in the schools, although directed to work in their homes. It draws on the schools and teachers also.

And, if needed, there is a line of endeavor for our male campers too, inasmuch as they can help our female campers to cope with home betterment projects.

2. *Child care; parent's education:*

Nonetheless, we can look towards the care of children—babies and younger folks: personal hygiene habits; preparation of food; information about how to cure minor ailments. In general, adult education would revolve about this phase of family relations. Later on, I shall touch on other aspects to be considered in parental education.

### 3. *Nutrition:*

It is a fact that nutrition and health standards are very low in Tanamá. As many of the dwellers can work a piece of land, we can think of having as many Tanamians as possible, to prepare, work on, and maintain their own vegetable plot. Vegetable plots might help to diversify the land products, improve dietary deficiencies, and supply them with more food.

There is an opportunity to start the development of the sharing, cooperative attitude, quite absent from the people, when they begin to help each other in said economic enterprise.

Our campers can help in the activity. They can give information if needed, they can lend a hand, if necessary, and above all, they should sell this idea to the inhabitants.

This activity allows for cooperation, and hence, a demonstration of the said spirit to Tanamians—from the pertinent Government agencies, local organizations, and, specifically, from teachers and schools of the area. Extension Service agents have already stepped in, and 4-H clubs are on the move.

### 4. *Family life:*

Family life orientation can subtly be brought in while carrying on the above activities. We should be careful not to stress the downfall of the male hierarchy, but to arouse a more human interest from parents (especially the fathers) to their children. For example, to have the parents feel the need of and provide a better education for their children. We should not stress moral speeches of paternal rights, but with casual comments on the advantages of a better education try to sell the school and teachers to the parents. Later on, teachers should work to follow this up.

### 5. *Health:*

In the health area, we have the inadequacy of sanitary facilities for the disposal of wastes. There is an urgent need for latrine construction projects. We might have to fight some

obstacles. Among others, Tanamians have the attitude of waiting for others to do the job.

If a community awakening is to be achieved we must tackle this "take, and take but not give" attitude. We must not train them to depend solely and heavily on others, specifically, on government agencies. We have to make them aware of their own resources, proper initiative, and self-doing, by their own skills, plans and pooled resources to guide them to common undertaking for their common good.

Tanamians show an attitude of confidence and respect for their bossfarmers, and in one another. We can bring these farmers into this construction activity, not only as a guiding social force but as a financial support group.

Our campers, male and female, have an excellent opportunity for social contacts and for manual help to the people. Likewise, there is an opportunity for active cooperation from the local and district health authorities, religious and civic leaders.

For our campers there is a fine opportunity to give information and education on personal hygiene. We must make use of any moment to stress good personal health habits and attitudes; for example, in case of illness to have them visit doctors and nurses at the Health Unit or Rural Dispensary, instead of visiting country spiritists. We can contribute to eradicate their fatalistic reliance on superstition and magic.

#### *6. Improvement of water supply:*

Another line of action might be along the improvement of the water supply. It will call for active participation of local citizens, workcampers, sponsors, civil organizations, sanitary agents, schools and government agencies. Which difficulties do we have to fight? How to overrun them? Can we plan for a rural aqueduct? Can we give information and training on how to keep water safe for human use? We have to study possibilities with care.

### 7. *Recreational facilities:*

Youngsters and even adults need very badly recreational facilities. Which facilities call for first priorities? Which can be worked out by campers alone? How can we get additional help from local persons and organizations, and, specially, from our Parks and Recreation Commission? Undoubtedly, we must recruit the help of the Tanamians—laborers and farmers, adults and youngsters—to what might be really workable for them and for us.

### 8. *Low standard of living:*

To tackle the paramount problem of the region—its low standard of living—, calls for other activities. Action should be directed to make local farmers, great and small, grasp the values and merits of a proper land use, the adherence to a soil conservation program, and to enlarge and better existing marketing facilities. Adequate training to farm laborers and the betterment of their means of transportation are needed.

All activities oriented to increase local production likewise increase working opportunities, income, and, consequently, raise local standards of living. And better living conditions provide a healthier habitat in which to develop wholesome personal and group attitudes: mutual help, endogamic solidarity, common enterprising, and trustful sharing. Slowly but firmly, a “community feeling” might grow up in Tanamá.

### *Without haste but working onward:*

Am I planning too much? No; I have set forth some lines of action that might serve as a frame of reference for campers, sponsors, and interested parties to discuss and decide. Final blueprints of action must not forget that attitudes grow slowly and that changes in attitudes work still more slowly. Expectations should always be rightfully centered and weighed, without haste, but working onward.



## THE "WORKCAMP" AS AN EDUCATIVE INSTRUMENT

### 1. *To students and teachers:*

For students and teachers participating, the workcamp should be a natural social laboratory. It allows for first-hand experiences with people, their needs, their ways of accomplishment and social desiderata. It furnishes a vivid experience to observe, manipulate and study a myriad of know-hows, mostly dealt with in books and school-rooms, such as facts, principles, generalizations, and the like.

The workcamp furnishes a priceless opportunity for training in research and conscientious leadership, for sensing and feeling the clashing forces of social inertia and social change. It means a way to help the underclass, who deserve a chance to feel happy, and to prepare the gifted ones as public servants, who need to develop the spirit of service and dedication to humanity.

To students of education, the workcamp is a fine opportunity to know rural life, with its beauties and difficulties; to see the social and natural habitat of their future working sphere serves as a wonderful laboratory experience and stimulates them to sense the dignity and dedication called upon by the teaching profession.

### 2. *To Tanamá dwellers:*

For them, the workcamp and campers' activities should bring up their latent initiative and enduring will to cope with their problems—personal and communal. It should bring up their intra-group spirit and pride; everything aiming to foster and develop a sincere, constant, sharing and cooperative attitude, and, primarily, a feeling of belonging towards the "community" and of self-sufficiency for all.

### 3. *To the sponsors:*

For the sponsors of Tanamá Project, and of future similar projects, this social and educative tool should serve as a guide

to vitalize their programs of social action and human welfare. To Earlham College it has a place in its curricular make-up, under their Community Dynamics Seminar.

And to the University of Puerto Rico: A guide to study and help other undeveloped areas in the Island; an experience laboratory to help its students study rural life and social phenomena; and, fundamentally, a direct contact of our University and its leaders with the real common men and common women of Puerto Rico, thus to demonstrate—in action—its program of service and dedication and its great interest in a happier Puerto Rico.

## PART II: THE EDUCATIONAL VALUES OF THE TANAMÁ WORKCAMP PROJECT

After living for approximately seven weeks in Tanamá, Adjuntas—in the mountains in the coffee region of Puerto Rico, about 16 kilometers from the urban site—I have come to the conclusion that Tanamá has educational merits and values, as may have all workcamps. Workcamps may be labeled as educational instruments. Universities and colleges may use them as teaching techniques to vitalize their curricula, in so far as they really add to the education of the student. Without doubt, they bring about desirable changes in the development of both students and teachers participating.

Workcamps as an educational device should be thought of as means of achieving goals—goals adequately set up and worked out in advance, so that participating students and teachers will be, in mind and heart, fully aware of them. Activities to be undertaken in a workcamp could then be aimed towards the attainment of these goals. Workcamps, when planned in a hit and miss fashion, can easily fall short of their educational expectations. In this respect I believe that workcamp directors have to be not only fully aware of the goals to be achieved, but

also mentally alert to possible changes of camp activities, provided these changes are consistent with the overall purpose of the workcamp. Directors need this flexible yet comprehensive attitude to cope with the numerous personal and social forces imposed on workcamps. This was especially true in Tanamá. Educational media are means to an end, but by themselves they cannot perform miracles. The potential of a workcamp must be fully developed by those responsible for the operation of it.

Let us examine Tanamá specifically. Did the workcamp experience add to the students' growth and development? To their grasp of knowledge and skills? Did it change their attitudes? Did their experiences make them aware of a more responsible type of citizenship? A more conscientious planning of their careers? Did they pick up additional training related to their fields of specialization at the University? Did they sense the untiring efforts of a new Puerto Rico, working for a higher standard of living? Did they develop a sincere love for our Island? Did they inspire the people of Tanamá with hope for personal and community improvement? Did they learn more about our democratic way of life? How did they visualize our rural people, life, and problems? ↴

If I had to answer "Yes" or "No", I would not hesitate to say "Yes." If I were asked to substantiate my answer, I would rely on the testimonies of the University of Puerto Rico students who participated in the 1954 workcamp. However, I would rely not so much on their oral testimonies as on my observation of their personal growth and development. And, I may add, on my own growth as a teacher and, above all, as a human being. Personal and group growth, I believe, is difficult to measure objectively. I don't know of any testing device delicate and reliable enough to result in a score which would stand scientific inquiry. Nevertheless, the development of the students at Tanamá this summer has been worthy of the financial allotment made by the University authorities to the project.

If I were asked for more detail, I would rely on the opinions of several citizens from Adjuntas who watched the

development of the camp closely. These include Alfredo Abreu, Ruy Delgado, especially, and also several Tanamá inhabitants—Don Cheo Sanabria, Mrs. Tete de Maldonado, Mrs. Margot de Ramos, Mrs. Ampar de Sanabria, the carpenters Juan and Martín, Juan Acosta, and others. In addition, I would rely on reports from Extension Service personnel, particularly our co-workers, Mrs. Juanita González and Mr. P. J. Ramírez.

My word alone, as a sole guaranty, would not be sufficient proof. Let us examine the Tanamá experience of 1954.

The life in Tanamá with the valley folks for seven weeks is an exciting experience in itself. To live together with a continental group adds more excitement. People coming from Adjuntas to observe and assist the campers increases our microcosm. Lecturers visiting the camp to discuss topics of interest to us stimulate our intellectual curiosity. When University and Government officials come to inquire about what is going on, we are given the opportunity to sense our responsibility. Close social contacts with the inhabitants of Tanamá teach us new customs, thinking, and patterns of living. Tanamá provides a social laboratory where students and teachers are not merely silent spectators, but are active participants.

Even for the camper the setting is new, and many adjustments must be made by the individual in relation to living quarters, meals, personal tastes, sleeping habits, care of clothing, participation in activities, use of leisure time, etc. These adjustments are oriented toward efficient group living, work, and play. The student must make the adjustment by himself, or they are forced upon him by the group. Away from home and the University campus, he must conform to the conservative living pattern of a rural area.

The relationships within the camp—between the University of Puerto Rico group and the Earlham group—and the relationships of the entire group of campers with the Tanamá Valley people provided a variety of social contacts. The many social forces in effect were felt by everyone. Although such

situations are frequently discussed in classrooms and read many times in books, this was a most important experience for students. Even though an individual in the camp was primarily concerned with himself, there were times when his feelings or desires had to be subjugated to those of the group. This experience of learning to conform for the purpose of group unity was educational. In our University of Puerto Rico group we had marked examples of such social adjustment and personal progress. An incidental advantage of the camp was the opportunity it gave the University of Puerto Rico students to speak English. I, myself, profited from this opportunity.

Another stimulating experience for the campers is the act of living together with the valley folks—to live within similar limitations, to run the same risks of health and life, to feel the same hot sun and the cool weather, to endure the heavy rain and mud. The camper is thrust into the midst of the social, economic, and cultural life of the coffee population. He has personal and direct contact with the people and is able to observe their way of living and behavior, and to compare them with other groups more familiar to him. He can confirm or deny information received in classroom or read in books. Under such circumstances he is bound to learn not only facts, but how to deal with people. He learns to serve and to help them, and to teach them to help themselves. He learns to respect their poverty and to feel their human dignity. He is touched by their hospitality and generosity.

Try to imagine Don Pedro and Doña Monse, a very poor couple who came to our camp asking us to help fix an electric socket in their shack. A crew was assigned to do the job. Don Pedro wanted to return the favor, and as he did not have any other thing to give, he played Puerto Rican folksongs to the boys and girls who had helped him. This may be a very small incident, but it had tremendous effect on our campers, particularly on the University of Puerto Rico group. It was a revealing incident which made our Puerto Rican students aware of the needs of the less privileged in our Island. Don Pedro's case is only one of many others I could describe.

We find our campers not only receiving information, but changing attitudes and behavior. We lived like a family. I was the proud father and companion to this responsible, generous, hardworking, intelligent group of students. They were always ready and willing to work—in rain, sun, or mud. They were willing to make sacrifices. Distance meant nothing to them. They eased my job of supervising and helped me find a place within the camp. The behavior of the University of Puerto Rico students as a group deserves praise. This is especially true since the students did not have an opportunity of becoming well acquainted before the beginning of the camp period.

The acquisition of social skills became a product of the social relationships. Groups regularly visited almost all of the valley families. Both educational and recreational films were shown to them. Meetings were held with Tanamians. We held a Demonstration Day, similar to a small *feria*, and over 200 persons from Adjuntas and the valley attended. The campers were in contact with girls' and boys' 4-H clubs, women's clubs, and men's committees. They attended meetings at which the Tanamians discussed plans for building a community center which, in addition to being their recreation center, will serve as a meeting place for various groups.

Students acquired a valuable amount of knowledge in the process of setting up the camp. Starting camp operations called upon the imagination and ingenuity of everyone. We all profited through participation in the every-day camp activities. Organization of and carrying out of the plans for Demonstration Day included activities in sewing, carpentry, cooking, drawing, making posters, etc. Evidence of the success of Demonstration Day was clearly indicated by the increase of interest in home-improvement furniture and equipment, chicken coops, and rabbit hutches.

Although campers were unable to participate in any large projects, such as building a school or a road, I feel that this summer's experience of teaching the people of the Valley to help themselves has been a rewarding one, both to students and

to the people. I don't feel that a workcamp to be successful must have on its program plans for a large-scale construction project. On the other hand, if there is a need for such a project, such as the Tanamá Community Center, it is preferable for campers to work closely with the people of the Valley, helping them recognize the need for the center and helping them build it. In the same manner, it is better for campers to help the people recognize their other needs and assist them in solving their problems.

An example of such guidance was the home improvement program. When the women of the valley came to the camp to build their dressers and tinajas, they brought the materials, and they learned to sew, nail, sand, and paint their equipment. Similarly, when our campers assisted the 4-H boys in building their rabbit hutches, the same principle was followed. Campers taught the know-how and the use of available resources-both human and physical.

What about additional training for students along their lines of specialized college studies? If the workcamp is organized with this objective in mind, it could be accomplished.

For Education students there are numerous activities which, if well planned, would provide experience in practice teaching. For those who plan on teaching in rural areas, the experience of living in the same environment they will eventually be working in is invaluable. Daily classes can be organized for first-graders, illiterates, for those who wish to learn English, etc. During the last weeks of the 1954 camp, students held classes in English for both children and adults.

For Home Economics students there is a wide area in which to gain experience. Tanamá women came frequently to ask for suggestions for improving their meals, and, as mentioned earlier, came for assistance in building home equipment. Working with the Home Demonstration Extension agents, Home Economics students gain field-work experience. The daily operation of the camp itself provides practical experience in nutrition, diet, and cooking.

Future agronomists of Puerto Rico have an excellent opportunity for field practice in working with Extension agents in Tanamá. This was demonstrated by the two students from the College of Agriculture at Mayagüez who participated in the camp this year.

I have already indicated how the workcamp experiences can provide further training for Social Science and Humanities students. Tanamá is the laboratory wherein the student can observe and apply many things he has learned in the classroom and from books.

For the Natural Science student, the workcamp and the surrounding area may be a laboratory for his scientific pursuits.

To what extent the workcamp contributes directly to the student's training depends on those in charge of the Tanamá project. I would not say that the workcamp is a substitute for classrooms, books, or teachers, but rather a supplement. I don't feel that it is a revolutionary teaching technique, but rather that it is an instrument which can make students aware that education is not only to be gotten from books or in classrooms.

From the day we started organizing the workcamp, our students had many opportunities to participate in making plans and decisions regarding the activities to be undertaken. The students had opportunities to head committees and to accept responsibility. Under the guidance of the Director of the workcamp, and Extension Service personnel, major activities to be undertaken were determined by group meetings, during which students had the opportunity to speak freely and to vote. The camp followed democratic procedures in its daily operations. Our consultations and meetings with the people of the Valley were on a democratic basis. Extension Service has a policy of consulting with the people in Tanamá when preparing programs for the area. All of these practices provided a sound atmosphere for the training of our students. Even the camp budget was, at times, subject to group hearings and scrutiny, as were also the camp's program of public relations and its commitments.



I know that the Tanamá project helped the students discover Puerto Rico —not only the continentals, but the University of Puerto Rico students also. Even I, because of my experience in Tanamá, am now in a better position to judge the problems of our coffee area.

The Puerto Rican students had never seen such beautiful sunsets, nor such silvery full moons, and had never before felt the solemn majesty of our evergreen countryside. And many of the students had never before seen the efforts or felt the anxieties of our rural population, constantly striving under many handicaps for a better life.

The summer in Tanamá awakened in our students the feeling that the more privileged Puerto Ricans should be made aware of the plight of our countrymen and help educate them to help themselves. Our students became conscious, working in a realistic situation, of the need to serve our people and now have a better picture of our Island. They have come to know and love our rural people.

I also observed that the students' esthetic tastes were more developed. All of their experiences in some way contributed to such growth. In addition, they had the opportunity to read, and to listen to the classical music broadcast over the Government radio station WIPR. Many of the campers were fond of such music, as well as of popular music. Meditation periods allowed time for spiritual and religious thoughts. On Sundays, those who wished to go to church in the morning were authorized to leave the camp. Short trips were usually scheduled for the rest of the day. They learned to accept and reciprocate the hospitality of the valley people. I watched the students grow and mature, in mind and in heart.

I also saw a community feeling develop among the country folks. They cooperated enthusiastically in all camp activities. We worked to have them feel that this was their project as well as ours. Let me cite another incident. When we were preparing for our Demonstration Day, Radamés —a 4-H boy— came with

a chicken coop he had built all by himself after having watched some of the campers build similar ones under the guidance of Mr. Ramírez. The boy even brought chicks to be shown. Don Gaspar also helped his son build a coop for the *feria*. This cooperative attitude we found in the girls and adults also. Carpenters in the *barrio* helped their families and friends finish dressers which had not been completed. Martín came to help us install the corrugated iron roof in our kitchen —without pay. Juan Sanabria helped us plan and budget for the construction of the 4-H club house.

As a last word, I want to repeat that the Tanamá work-camp has educational values as all workcamps have; that workcamps are educational devices to supplement classroom work and, as such, they help to vitalize college curricula and bring about desirable changes in the development of students and teachers participating.