

Appendix E

Institutions and Institutionalization

This handbook emphasizes the distinction between institution and organization, even though it recognizes a close relationship and the fact that "institution building" almost always deals with a concrete, specific organization.

This rationale is based on some common definitions of "institution." John R. Commons holds that an institution is "collective action in control of individual action." Such control is manifest through liberating the actions of some, restraining the actions of others, and expanding the scope of action of still others. One means by which individual action is controlled is providing what Commons calls "security of expectations." Another view of an institution is "a set of rules guiding behavior of individuals that are valued by the Society." Under each of these definitions, the rules or controls of the individual's actions are enforced or provided by Society as the collective actor.

Institutions are invisible, even though very real. They must function through organizations, often administrative forms provided by Society. It is through concrete, specific organizations that institutions become visible, concrete, and tangible. As important as the organization is, it is necessary to look beyond the organization to its impact on "individual action" in order to deal with institutions, institution building, and institutionalization.

The institution we are dealing with is "publicly supported innovation in the technology of agricultural production." The control is expected to be manifest in liberating producers from inadequate technology and in liberating consumers from food scarcities and high food prices. It may also restrain some farmers from continuing to use obsolete and inefficient technology. Indirectly, businesses serving agriculture and the agricultural population can be expected to have an expanded field of activity. For this to happen, it is clear that the impact of the technology innovation must be significant and it must be widespread.

The organizations most clearly involved are those dealing directly with research and extension. They are the most visible of the organizations dealing with technology innovation, and they are the object of our interest in institution building. However, it needs to be clear that many other organizations have important roles to play in the institution of publicly supported agricultural technology innovation--organizations such as universities, civil service commissions, fund allocating bodies, other government agencies, marketing organizations, policy-making groups, and even donors.