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ABSTRACT

Veraguas province, Panama, is an example of the need to have generalists, not specialists, deal with the interrelated aspects of rural areas in developing nations. Intricate connections between living standards, agricultural production, market and credit structures, land tenure, the political system, the social structure, education, health, values, and culture make it fruitless to attempt an artificial isolation of one particular problem for the application of outside technical expertise. The primary step for the introduction of change in the Veraguases of the world is essentially a political one. The problems of development can be characterized by two general inadequacies: lack of motivation and insufficient organization. Since education is largely a function of motiviation or ideology, a vision of change and hope is required before the acquisition of knowledge and skills seem important and necessary. A successful change agent must have the characteristics of authority, communication and access to power, competence and the ability to impart it, and protection. The most relevant outside presence to assist the campesinos (people from the fields) is not the expert who tends to adapt indigenous problems to his expertise, but the trained and sensitive generalist who adapts his limited skills to the campesino's entire problem circle. (BRR)

THE CASE FOR THE GENERALIST IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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THE CASE FOR THE GENERALIST IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

George C. Lodge

In the Spring of 1964, a group of us from the Harvard Business School had the opportunity to work in Panama with Bishop Marcos McGrath, one of the leaders of the social action wing of the Catholic Church in Latin America and the principal architect of CEPAS, the Center for Study, Promotion and Social Assistance, in the province of Veraguas. We went there to observe the development efforts that were initiated and directed by Panamanians, with a minimum of financial and material assistance from the outside, in the rural areas of the province.

CEPAS is the social and, in a sense, the political arm of the Church. Its purpose is to plan the economic development of Veraguas and to furnish various types of social assistance The Center is completely staffed by locally trained leaders who deal directly with the campesinos (people from the fields), introducing them slowly to change. CEPAS does not isolate a single problem in the countryside but treats a series of problems together. Thus it is, at once, an organization providing technical advice giving moral backing, forming groups, developing and training leaders among the campesinos, and reaching into a variety of agricultural activities

Since then, I have been able to compare these observations with the problems that exist in places like Northeast Brazil and South Viet Nam. Although the Veraguas experience did not supply a universally applicable change model,' there nevertheless are several definitive characteristics of that environment which seemingly mirror rural communities in the Veraguases of other modernizing nations.

A World That Invites Change

Veraguas province, located about 150 miles west of Panama City, is bordered by the Caribbean on the north and the Pacific on the south. The population is approximately 150,000, or roughly one-tenth of the national total. Santiago, the provincial capital and largest town has a population of 10,000 Sona, with a population of 4,000 ranks second. Nearly 90% of the people reside in the countryside and away from these two centers.

Diverse population groups live in Veraguas. In the north, there are some 2,000 Guaymi Indians. Most of the commercial, professional, and educated inhabitants are in Santiago and Sona. The remainder of the population consists mainly of campesinos who live in a variety of settlement patterns.

Small villages, inhabited by 30 to 150 families, are found throughout the countryside. These may be the seat of a school district, have one or two small general stores, a chapel, a few water pumps, and perhaps a dance floor. While a few huts may be concentrated around a clearing, most are scattered within a radius of one to three miles. Finally, outside of the campesino communities live numerous isolated family groups consisting of as many as ten members. Usually, these families are poorer than other campesinos, none of their members has attended school, and they are highly superstitious.

It is a harsh area The topsoil is thin and mostly of a lateritic type, rich in minerals but poor in organic matter. Oxidation of the minerals results in a hard

top layer. The scrub vegetation appears lush but the soil is generally poor for cultivation of crops. The fertile topsoil that does build up is washed away each year by heavy rains which last from May to mid-December. The rains are sometimes so violent that most campesinos find it necessary to dig drainage ditches around their stick-and-thatched houses to prevent them from being washed away. The rainy seasons alternate with dry seasons, but the climate is hot the year around, with an average temperature of 80 degrees.

The campesinos in Veraguas are impoverished and deprived in virtually every respect: wealth, culture, education, and health. They live in communities which are isolated and detached from the central government in Panama City. There is an absence of cohesion within the community and groups any larger than four, outside of the family, are essentially unknown. Marriages are rarely formal or legal; it is not unusual for a man to have two or three "wives." The men accept responsibility for their immediate family household group, but rarely contribute any support money to their offspring from a prior "marriage." There are few of the historical community groups or traditional leaders in the villages. Group decisions, the election of and faith in leaders, are all foreign to the campesinos of Veraguas.

Traditionally, power has flowed downward from Panama City to Santiago and from there to the countryside. There is a mayor in Santiago and he appoints aldermen to govern the campesinos in the province. These aldermen have little power, are generally unpaid, and show little desire to enter into or solve disputes between members of the community. Their only apparent function seems to be one of acting as the eyes and ears of the mayor in order to keep him informed of restlessness among the campesinos. The nearby sugar mill, however, provides something of a judicial structure for the community. When people get into fights over who burned whose field, the mill is apt to be the nearest thing to a courtroom in the area.

The election process, a one day contract in which a bottle of local liquor or cash is exchanged for a vote, leaves the people with no feeling of participation in the political system. The responsibility of elected officials to their constituents does not extend beyond this brief transaction at voting time. Some politicians even view it as their right to recoup the vote-getting expenses of their election during their term of office. The campesino has no immediate community structure or larger national group with which he can identify. Politics and government are simply a system of contractual favors, far removed from concepts of justice, political participation, or representative democracy.

The mentality of the campesino presents many impediments to development. His lack of skills, not only agricultural and technical, but also in decision-making, can be viewed in terms of the information he gathers, the conceptual system into which the information is fitted, the skill with which he makes decisions, and the value systems by which options are chosen. On all four points, the decision-making quality of the campesino in Veraguas province is in striking contrast to that employed in more developed areas of the world. He has no systematic way to gather economic data. The ability to judge and manipulate information relevant to the most basic commodity in his daily existence, his rice harvest, is apparently absent. Presumably, the rice is used until the supply runs out.

The campesino's motivational system seriously impedes progress toward development. He has an unshakeable belief in personal luck and destiny as the controlling factors in material success. God is seen as directing every aspect of existence while man only lives out his destiny, some with luck, others with misfortune. Whenever an individual talks about what he will be doing the next day, he invariably adds, "If God grants it." This is in recognition of God's immediate power and if an individual does not so recognize it, he may be struck "sick" or worse before he is able to realize his plans. Believing this, their lives and their

world are viewed as governed by great cosmic forces pressing down upon them. Success or achievement, therefore, comes through luck, not hard work or intelligence. Most campesinos say of themselves, "We are the poor people," emphasizing the present tense of the verb "to be." They are not just experiencing a temporary decline, but a permanent state.

Economically, the most visible characteristic is extreme poverty. Veraguas is the seat of power for two or three families who own most of its fertile land. They have little interest in the welfare of the people in the province, and their relatives serve as the overseers and administrators of all the choice properties. The average annual income was measured at between $45-$50 per year, substantially below the official government estimate. At least 80% of the people in this province are illiterate for any functional purpose.

Campesinos, for the most part, are marginal, subsistence farmers—marginal in the sense that a decline in the price of rice or corn in the national market has grave consequences for them. They are the first to suffer when demand falls. And subsistent in the sense that little excess production is ever available for sale. A year of bad weather, for example, can have catastrophic effects on families.

They have little ability and incentive to sell agricultural goods on the national market where, historically, campesinos have never been a major force. This situation is combined with their growing dependence in the market as consumers. Once, they made clothes and hats, slaughtered their own cattle, acted as their own midwives, invented stories and devised their own amusement. Now, they are tending more to buy clothes and meat, depend on professional medical help, and listen to transistor radios. With cash income levels ranging from $50 to $350 per year, campesinos are caught in the trap of being dependent upon consumer items without the means to purchase them. Furthermore, few farmers are in a position to be classified as good credit risks. Those who actually receive loans from government agencies are among the richest. This is due to the U. S. Government's policy, through our aid program in Panama, of encouraging local government institutions to loan only to good credit risks. This policy leaves unsolved the mystery of how poor campesinos can ever qualify to be good credit risks.

There has been a good Agrarian Reform Law, but the problems of applying and enforcing it are many and complicated. These factors are not, however, peculiar to either Panama or Veraguas. Although the purpose of the law is to allow campesinos to buy the land, which they actually farm at a reasonable price over a period of time, only about 1% of the land has been affected by the Land Reform program in Veraguas. Before a campesino can take advantage of the law, he must first know of its existence, which many do not. He must be able to understand the law and the function of the Land Reform office. He must go to the capital in Santiago and have a request formulated, either verbally or in writing. He then must be prepared to make three or four return trips to get action on this request. With the illiteracy rate so high, and the bus fare costing the campesino half a day's wage per trip—in addition to losing a day's work—it is hardly surprising that Land Reform is such a slow process.

In order for the campesino to obtain his day-to-day necessities and medicines from the local store, he has to mortgage his rice in advance of the harvest to the storekeeper. The wide fluctuation in price always moves in favor of the storekeeper, with its low point coming at harvest time. Because the campesino has no storage facilities for his harvested rice, he is forced to sell when the price range is at its lowest level and obtain credit from the storekeeper when rice is high in price. The storekeeper, then, keeps the campesino in a condition of economic dependency, a role that gives him social and political standing in the community. Yet, it would be accurate only in the abstract to say that he is exploiting his position as a storekeeper, in reality, he doesn't have it much better than the campesino

and he does provide a necessary service, however advantageous it may seem to an outsider. His somewhat exalted status in the community is just part of the whole system in which everyone is trapped in spite of himself.

The campesino is bound to a ruthlessly self-adjusting social and economic structure which resists change while encouraging its own perpetuation. To now reflect on his condition is to see him as clinging to an illusory lifeboat and subsequently to an all pervasive apathy. It is God's will that life is as it is, that he be destined to leave to his son the same inheritance he himself received from his father: the knowledge of how to use only his hands for survival.

This man is thus increasingly a non-member of a non-community, of a society with which he has none of the socio-political ties and relationships upon which a set of meaningful expectations can be based. He is the helpless wanderer in a socio-political void, the mute, anonymous statistic that baffles economists and planners; the target of guerrillas looking for a secret home; the threat to all those who hold power, the menace, and at the same time, the means to all that is comprehended by development, peace and tranquility. He lives in a world which invites radical change to a degree that can only be defined as revolutionary.

The popular idea, however, that the campesino constitutes a force within himself for violent revolution has more to do with nostalgia for the Mexican, the Cuban, and to a lesser extent the Bolivian Revolution of 1952, than it does with fact. The conditions under which he lives would be cause for revolt for anyone living outside his world, but the man immersed in it, and numbed by his own tenuous existence, knows no alternative. He will use force in his own defense, but will not voluntarily use violence or bear arms against outsiders. Although the campesino does not directly hold the threat of violence, he can serve as an instrument for exploitation by professional agitators. Still, he must be given the gun, the ammunition, and the target, before he can be agitated enough to break out into open revolt against established powers. Even with those forces present, the inertia in his life situation has in the past neutralized considerable external influences, a scene recently illustrated before the world press when the experienced and charismatic Che Guevara worked so assiduously to provoke the campesino of Bolivia to throw aside the certain misery of his life for the possible rewards of revolution.

It is unwise to believe that his past lassitude should be a complacent prologue to his future, or that the concept of gun and ammunition will continue to have meaning solely within the aforementioned literal frame of reference. For in a figurative manner, the quantum jumps in the medium of communication have brought the government closer to the campesino, and consequently the target into a clearer field of fire. His horizons are slowly moving out from the nearest line of trees to somewhere beyond; he is showing an increased willingness to innovate, to take risks, his interests, concerns, awareness of and expectations in the processes of government are awakened; he is beginning to realize, and to exhaust, the alternatives in his hands. these are weapons of incipient power, the magnitude of which is difficult to measure and dangerous to misjudge.

The Expert

The problems of Veraguas are all interrelated, self-supporting parts of a circle. They cannot be treated effectively if they are treated separately. There are intricate connections between living standards, agricultural production, market and credit structures, land tenure, the political system, the social structure, education, health, values, and culture. It is fruitless to attempt an artificial isolation of one particular problem for the application of outside technical expertise.

The primary step for the introduction of change in the Veraguases of the world is essentially a political one. There must be in place a political receptacle

which can receive technical and economic injections of aid and convert them, as an engine converts fuel, into meaningful energy To be effective, this engine of change must be sensitive to the entire problem circle and be capable of dealing with several facets, as appropriate, more or less simultaneously. It must be able to move in many directions at once and work in the political, social, and economic sectors of the circle. It has to recognize the extent to which improved access to land and production methods can be used to force more useful market and credit structures The degree to which these changes produce more advantageous political influence will, in turn, help to insure more beneficial governmental attention.

In spite of our knowledge of this situation, we still isolate one part of the circle for specialized treatment As Americans, we revere the expert: we educate him, train him, place little letters beside his name and honor him in every way. We can hardly put him in a place like Veraguas, then, and expect him not to use his expertise. But if we are to be reasoned and intelligent about development in the modernizing nations, and learn from our experiences of the past, we will have to come to the understanding that the expertise of our experts is based on experience totally irrelevant to the facts, and that it does more harm than good within the context in which they are trying to apply it.

As we train more and more specialists in the United States, it places a heavy burden, even on our own managerial structure, to integrate, organize, and utilize them effectively Generally speaking, we are set up in both our private and public sectors to do this, although there is some reason to believe that we are short of capable generalists If this is the problem in the United States, it is of course even more acute abroad, where the U. S trained specialist is nearly useless—or worse, demoralizing, unless he is carefully supervised by a generalist or is part of an organization with a generalist orientation to development problems

Schools, for example, are constructed with little regard for their contribution to the growth of long-term development institutions. In a sense, education is less hobbled by the lack of teachers and facilities than by the unwillingness of the campesino parent to encourage his child to attend school regularly, on time, year after year, and to study and value his education. The parent finds it difficult to understand why his child should learn to read and write and work with numbers if his livelihood is to be secured by putting a stick in the ground, planting rice seed, and harvesting it on land that may be taken from him at any time. The campesino father has no reason to hope that education will open to his son a life which is any different from his own Education, that is, the acquisition of knowledge, is a function of motivation and aspiration and some vision of change is required before it can become germane and useful to his life and that of his son.

Seeds, fertilizers, and insecticides are of marginal value unless changes take place in market, distribution, transport, and credit structures, as well as in systems of land tenure. In one Latin American country, a highly trained U. S. agricultural technician was sent to assist a campesino with his tomato crop. The campesino was reluctant to use the fertilizer and seed offered by the technician because he viewed any change as a risk to his already imperiled livelihood. He finally cooperated with the technician and as a result his crop was bigger and better than any of those from years past. But the rains washed out the road to his farm and many of the tomatoes rotted in the field because the truck could not get through to take them to market. When it did arrive, it was, of course, the same truck as before, owned by the same local interests that controlled all the transport in the region. The market system was the same as before and the actual return to the campesino was not appreciably different. When the visiting expert suggested that he continue on his own the following year, purchasing fertilizer and better seed through an agricultural loan the man's face went blank. The credit system,

unchanged by the expert's visit, precluded obtaining funds for such purchases. And the campesino had no confidence whatsoever that he could get a loan and maintain a credit relationship The expert departed, puzzled and dejected, leaving the campesino more convinced than ever that any attempt at change is certain to be unproductive.

Agricultural production is not solely a technical problem or one that can be solved by experts alone It is fundamentally a political, economic, social, and cultural problem, a problem of land, of credit, and of market. And it is mainly a problem of the relationship of the campesino to his whole environment. Expert treatment on one segment of the circle does not prove contagious to all the other segments.

The Introduction of Change

The problems of development can be characterized by two general inadequacies, lack of motivation and insufficient organization. Education, as was cited previously, is largely a function of motivation or ideology. A vision of change and hope is required before the acquisition of knowledge and skills seems important and necessary. As long as the campesino has an overwhelming concern with sheer survival and lacks confidence in his own competence to effect change of any sort, development is virtually impossible. And it becomes increasingly more so when the campesino is isolated from the life of his nation, experiences vulnerability in face of the power structure, lacks influence within the political system, and is generally alienated from his immediate environment.[1]

The injection of material and technical assistance into areas which are characterized by motivation and organization vacuums accomplishes no purpose, and only proves harmful in several ways:

- Assistance is of no value unless its recipients are clear regarding its purpose. It must also have a sense of direction, and be capable of using material and technical injections for the achievement of structural change and growth.
- The introduction of an administrative bureaucracy without local roots, unattached to local needs and not representative of local interest is apt to bring corruption. This is particularly true when the administrative bureaucracy is called upon and expected to perform tasks which, given the nature of the system as a whole, it cannot perform.
- To the extent that matter and technique are provided from "the outside," unrelated to local initiative or action, the people are reinforced in their conviction that they have little or no control over their own destinies and are further discouraged from organizing to help themselves.
- For development to be in any sense real and effective, material and technical inputs must be preceded or at least accompanied by the creation of sociopolitical institutions or organizations. These organizations can be regarded as convenient receptacles for matter and technique and at the same time as engines of motivation and organization capable of a multifaceted and integrative approach to the problem circle. Economic development is in this sense dependent upon political development, with economic need acting as a useful lever for motivation and organization.[2]

An effective engine of change must follow a certain sequence of action. It is probable that the steps in this sequence may, in practice, merge or overlap one another.

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[1] These ideas were excerpted from an unpublished speech, "Basic Reactions to Change," by Professor Renato Tagiuri

[2] Excerpts from the Testimony of Dr Samuel P Huntington of Harvard University before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, March 1965

- Agitation: The campesino must be made clearly aware of a need which is more compelling than his fears, his doubts, and his conditioned hopelessness and indifference. For example, if you ask a campesino in Veraguas what his needs are, he may give you a list including money, a transistor radio, a bottle of liquor, or a new woman. For development purposes, fulfilling these needs is useless. Their acquisition has no necessary relation to the task of development. Agitation means the isolation, analysis, and dramatization of one need, the realization of which is reasonable and manageable.
- Motivation: The passivity of the campesino having been shaken, he begins to envision the possibility of change and the achievement of a new and more attractive relation to his environment. He begins to have aspirations. He is ready to move to fulfill the need about which he has become agitated. He is thus prepared to acquire necessary new skills and competence. Their acquisition in turn provides him with confidence in himself and in his ability to fulfill his needs. His motivation and his competence are closely interrelated and self-supporting.
- Organization. Having greater understanding of his needs and confidence in his competence to deal with them, the campesino becomes willing to join with—and trust—others in order to achieve the power necessary to reach his new-found objective. This allows him to move more forcibly into the surrounding political, social, and economic environment in a continuing and institutional way. The organization becomes, then, a useful receptacle for material and technical inputs, the purpose of which is to strengthen and provide it with the means for growth and expansion into new areas of need and change. As the organization grows, it has increased capacity to agitate and motivate its members, thus strengthening itself.
- Commitment. Finally, the campesino achieves commitment to whatever group or individual (engine) has brought him successfully through the first three steps of the sequence. He develops a sense of community loyalty, identity, and belonging. He has the beginnings of an ideology.

The process of change is filled with risks and dangers, for in any society there are always forces present whose interests are offended by innovation. A movement for change, therefore, needs the protection and guidance of authoritative forces. It also needs the capacity to communicate up the hierarchical ladder in order to explain itself. Communication is generally difficult in a developing society. In Latin America, relatively few people can talk to the campesino and be understood, believed, and trusted. Obviously, the Catholic Church has a tremendous head start in this area. But foreigners do, too, and the Peace Corps has found this to be true in its experience. When a Volunteer lives in a village and shares the daily life of a campesino, he is apt to be listened to and trusted. The campesino needs this kind of help in building communication "bridges" as well as the political, social, and economic links which will make him part of the national system. The process needs material, technical, and managerial assistance—all carefully applied so as to serve an organizational or institutional end.

A successful change engine or agent must have the following characteristics.

- Authority: The agent of change must be listened to and believed by the campesino.
- Communication and access to power: He must be able to communicate with the most remote campesino and at the same time have access to the power structure, so that, for example, he can obtain funds, material, and technical help as necessary.
- Competence and the ability to impart it: He must be able to understand and deal with, more or less simultaneously, a broad spectrum of rural needs, and to bring appropriate technological innovations to bear.

- Protection He must have the sustained will and capacity to protect the newly developing organization against the forces of the status quo and other predatory elements in the environment.

I once observed some of these characteristics demonstrated in another Latin America country In Ecuador, a team of Peace Corps Volunteers, who were working in an Urban Community Development project located in a swamp area, were terribly agitated that the army still had not provided fill to cover the garbage upon which the slum they had been living in was built. The Volunteers finally had enough of promises and marched up the hill in their stinking dungarees to the general's house and banged on the door The general wasn't in, but his wife was and the Volunteers invited her down to see the garbage and the slum. She was shocked at the sight of that foul place and made her husband's life miserable until he produced some fill This is authority This is communication, the capacity to communicate to the most remote person you are trying to organize. This is the ability to be understood, the accessibility to power which is so important to the engine of change

The criterion for the selection of the need around which to agitate is the degree to which it is useful for motivational and organizational purposes That is, it must be perceived with reasonable facility, it must be manageable, it must be big and broad enough to be meaningful, and it must provide the basis for a continuing effort, not a one-shot undertaking. It may not, however, be the need that would have been selected if other criteria, say those of an economist or agricultural technician, were applied.

In Veraguas the need for rice storage facilities was identified as being particularly useful according to these criteria One of the early pre-cooperatives built a bin which allowed members to store their own rice rather than pay the storekeeper for this service The storekeeper's wife, recognizing—perhaps unconsciously—the revolutionary, political, social, and economic implications of this action recruited a number of other women in the village and one night burned the bin down The small and fragile organization could well have crumbled at this point But the organization to which this pre-cooperative belonged was able to encourage them at this critical moment and provide a small supply of concrete blocks to build a new and better bin The incident was thus converted from an organizational minus into a definite plus, the new organization gained confidence that it could not only change its environmental structure but could also withstand attacks upon the new structure

Obviously, the significance of this event goes far beyond the need for rice storage facilities From the point of view of our development objectives, the rice storage bin was significant only in that around it a new organization or political institution was created with the capacity to meet needs beyond that of storage. This new institution was a creator of new structure, the core of a new community, bringing confidence, power, and hope to those involved. The event also demonstrates the role of the agent of change, in this case the pre-cooperative leadership, competence, access to power (the capacity to provide concrete blocks) and the ability to protect Finally it demonstrates what is perhaps the most important role of matter in development to strengthen the growth and power of a community or a political organization, or a development institution Matter which falls outside such a purposeful receptacle is only accidentally useful to development

Conclusion

Although many thoughtful people seriously question and properly so the rationale behind our involvement in the Veraguases of the world, it is plainly unacceptable to argue that those who have to live in these places should be left to themselves, or that the poverty and misery in our own backyard should be eradi-

cated before we look elsewhere There are first of all compelling moral reasons requiring those who have to share with those who have not for the sake of both. National boundaries are not justifiable barriers to human concern. Secondly, it is increasingly apparent that the neglected, vulnerable, chaotic rural areas of the world are tempting havens to neo-imperialists and predatory powers, who find such places convenient bases for war. We need no reminder of the dangers of escalation which accompany such wars and of their threat not only to freedom and national independence but also to the peace of the world and the survival of mankind. Thirdly, if the world is going to be able to feed itself and to build strong and integrated economies capable of supporting growth and higher standards of living, the orderly, efficient, and just utilization of land resources is imperative.

These efforts at development bring problems of their own, some of which are as significant as those which the efforts are intended to solve. For example, if weak governmental administrative units are asked and expected to perform tasks of which they are essentially incapable, and if this performance is a prerequisite to the receipt of money or goods, then falsification and corruption will almost surely follow. If the conviction of campesinos that their lives are controlled by "outside" forces is reinforced by establishing in their minds the hope that government agencies have come to solve their problems, then their initiative, self-confidence, and capacity for community action will be further retarded and their development impeded. Or, if their expectations of help from "outside" exceed what comes, the result will be deepening despair and disillusion.

The change we have discussed is radical, structural, permanent, and truly revolutionary. This fact, in itself, is a partial indicator of why national governments are at some disadvantage in effecting change and development in rural areas. As with other government agencies, the unwillingness of agents to go into the field and the inaccessibility of campesino-type homesteads greatly reduces the effectiveness of the agency. The most relevant outside presence, in terms of the preceding discussion, to assist the campesino in the Veraguases of the world, is not the expert who tends to adapt indigenous problems to his expertise, but the trained and sensitive generalist who adapts his limited skills to the campesino's entire problem circle

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