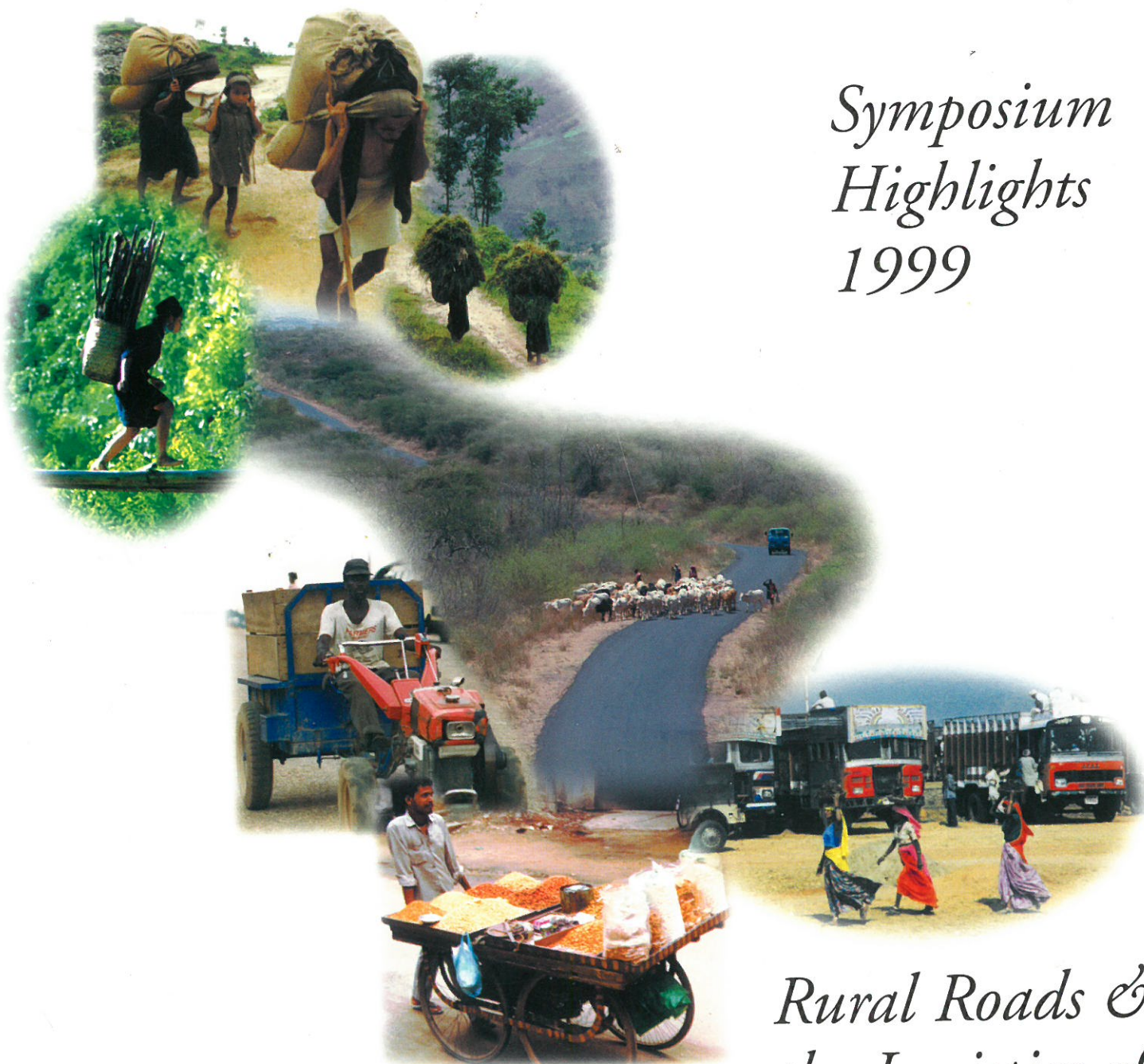




THE WORLD FOOD PRIZE

Symposium Highlights 1999



Rural Roads & the Logistics of Food Security



Rural roads were a sine qua non to spreading the new agricultural advances of the Green Revolution. Without these access routes new technological breakthroughs like miracle rice could not have reached those villages most in need.



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INTRODUCTION — A PATH TO SUCCESS

Beyond enhancing agricultural production, the benefits of rural roads were obvious: child mortality dropped; educational opportunities (especially for young girls) expanded; and respect for human rights increased.

As a young development officer in Southeast Asia in the late 1960s, it was my privilege to help spread the “Green Revolution” to villages in the Mekong River basin. Its impact was dramatic and immediate.

The new miracle rice which had just been developed at The International Rice Research Institute in the Philippines substantially changed the lives of all who planted it. Double and triple crops plus greatly expanded yields provided significant increases in personal income and an enhanced quality of life. As I drove through those villages on the recently upgraded road and over new cement bridges, the additional social benefits of this biotechnological breakthrough were obvious: children appeared well fed and more now attended school; healthcare was much more accessible and as a result child mortality dropped; housing was upgraded; generators and electric lights were prevalent; and radios and even some televisions could be heard.

But, at the point where the road and bridges ended, the scene changed abruptly. Suddenly, village life seemed virtually unchanged from the way it was one hundred years earlier: most children were stunted; few went to school; farming was on a one crop, basic subsistence level; there were few governmental services; and there was no way to import the fertilizer and pesticides needed to grow IR-8 rice, nor any means for trucks to transport crops to market.

The lesson driven home to me was clear: rural roads were a *sine qua non* to spreading the new agricultural advances and promoting social development.

I saw this same type of change nearly 30 years later while serving as Ambassador to Cambodia. Rural roads fostered economic progress but also became the pathways down which human rights workers traveled promoting democracy; young girls could find their way to stay in school; deminers proceeded to clear areas of land mines; and relief workers could deliver food aid to refugees.

Reflecting their appreciation of this phenomenon, my predecessor Herman Kilpper, Dr. Norman Borlaug and The World Food Prize Foundation Executive Committee chose the issue of “The Logistics of Food Security” as the 1999 Symposium topic. The following summaries of the presentation at the Symposium outline both ongoing humanitarian needs and the important role logistics will play in meeting them and promoting sustainable development in the 21st century.