The Youth Schemes in Malaysia: An Experiment in Land Development

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Land development has been pursued as both a means and an end in rural development in post-independence Malaysia since the mid-1950s. The backlog in processing of land applications, the land hunger in certain areas as against the presence of undeveloped or underdeveloped land in other areas, and the disparity in levels of income and standards of life between various parts of the country compelled measures to redress these situations. Several Federal agencies were instituted to implement land development programmes which often entail the establishment of new settlements. The largest and most well-known is the Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA), established in 1956, though the smaller agencies cannot be overlooked. Various State governments have also institutionalized land development following the provisions of the Land Act (Group Settlement Areas) of 1960. Many of these State undertakings were decided failures, for the rehabilitation of which the Federal Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Authority (FELCRA) was formed by an Act of Parliament in 1966. FELCRA is also responsible for initiating fresh projects known as fringe alienation schemes, which are basically intended to increase the aggregate farm size of selected farmers whose holdings are considered of uneconomic size (below six acres). FELCRA is charged with the broad objectives of raising income levels of those affected farmers through rehabilitation and consolidation of their holdings, and the creation of opportunities for rural youths to take part in land development through youth schemes. In 1976, FELCRA administered 26 rehabilitation schemes covering 29,524 acres, 32 consolidation schemes totalling 29,300 acres, and ten youth schemes involving 1,426 youths and covering an area of 29,064 acres (Fig. 1).

This paper focusses attention on the youth schemes, the first of which was started in 1972. As relatively new features on the Malaysian settlement scene, they would seem to merit a comment in terms of their inception and possible implications. By their rationale of land development and also through land settlement, and by their ultimate fruition as a settlement feature and type, the youth schemes do not differ from those established by FELDA. Certain circumstances, however, justify the difference in nomenclature of what essentially are the same type of settlement and these include the fact that these schemes are specially devised and organized for single youths who are debarred from participating in land settlement schemes established by FELDA. The FELCRA youth schemes are an attempt to harness the
potential labour resources of these youths, to anchor them to the life of a farmer, and to discourage an urban drift by this section of the population. It is intended that the youths will marry and establish their families as the schemes mature. Their participation as bachelors is construed as a period of apprenticeship or one in which the interest of the youths is resolved into a commitment to such a way of life concomittant with their role as modern and progressive farmers. These circumstances have called for a special administrative structure for the schemes, adapted to