

Civil Group Seminar at 4pm on 28<sup>th</sup> April in room A401 (Engineering Block)

## **Engineering for Rural Development in Africa – How might a British university participate?**

### **Outline of Seminar**

This seminar is primarily for engineering staff but may also be of interest to other members of Warwick's substantial 'Sub-Saharan Africa Research Network'.

About half the world's population is still rural and much of that half is poor and located in the Tropics, so the rural tropics represents a huge target for economic and technical development. However such development is constrained not just by lack of infrastructure, isolation, poor skills and scarcity of capital but also by the dislocations between agricultural and industrial societies. Asia is moving briskly from the rural to the urban-industrial. Africa by contrast is not – despite its frightening population growth rate of a 20-fold increase per century. So Africa has become the main concern of 'development technologists'.

Although it has a good track record in rural technology, a department like Warwick's School of Engineering primarily serves late-industrial societies by teaching future engineers and developing new 'high' technologies. The seminar will debate the issue:

As professionals and as academics, is there anything we can and should do here to relieve distant rural poverty?

We will address some of the constituent questions:

- Does rural Africa *actually need* the sort of research we can do here?
- Does research relevant to rural Africa fit our current institutional and personal agendas – in terms of funding, reputations, facilities and constraints? (Is 'development technology' a viable academic research niche in Britain 50 years after the end of 'empire'?)
- Are many of our graduates likely to find employment in this field?
- Does some exposure to 'how the other half lives' and to designing for a developing country context, much benefit our mainline students going on to careers in modern industry?
- Has this (relatively) rich university any obligation to engage in assisting the very poor and would its image benefit significantly from doing so?

*and finally*

- Where does this School go from here as its historical activities in development technology decline with staff retirement?

The seminar will use illustrations from past and current activities research and teaching activities.