same time it benefits many of the very poor by providing cheaper and/or more durable products. The mass of consumers benefit from plastic buckets and plastic sandals, but the producers lose work and maybe jobs.

In the 60s Indian metal-workers began making metal dishes and utensils out of aluminium, instead of the "traditional" but increasingly expensive brass and steel. The plates could easily be cut and shaped with simple machines and tools. They were sold in the villages, often by the workers themselves. It cost about £100 to create one job—an ideal application of appropriate technology it might be thought. But the aluminium came from Birla, India's second largest industrial consortium, and so Birla was alerted to the new market. It began making dishes from anodised aluminium. They sold better because they were shiny. That killed the village version.

So if Britain is to implement its policy of More Help for the Poorest, it cannot merely concentrate on the sort of technology it is best at—and hope the benefits will trickle down. It must take more direct steps to ensure that the very poor are able to benefit from technology (if they want to).

This requires recognition of the need to strengthen and develop traditional technology, rather than using imported technology to downgrade and maybe destroy it. Traditional technology is much stronger than many scientists and technologists (including Third World ones) think. It includes a wide range of skills (ironwork, waste recycling, hygiene, food preservation), a vast amount of local knowledge, and (provided there is little or no risk) a surprising amount of experimentation (often disparagingly referred to as trial-and-error). The way to help the very poor to make greater use of technology is to help them see how much they know already, and to encourage them to adapt that—and supplement it with new technology from outside.

A good example of this approach comes from Tanzania where a team spent two months in a village helping the villagers to analyse their own storage problems and devise their own methods of improving them. The team based its activities on the belief that the villagers themselves could go a long way towards solving their own problems on the basis of their own skills and resources. They returned to the villagers in a systematised form all the information they got from them, thus giving them confidence that they possessed a concrete technology.

The villagers were not overwhelmed into accepting the team's suggestions: they rejected many of them, including air-tight stores and communal storage, and picked and chose from along their own practices and the team's suggestions so that the end result was something they had designed themselves.

At the end of the two months, 15

Rus in urbe

KENNETH MELLANBY

NATURE abhors a vacuum. During the 1939–45 war, urban sites devastated by enemy bombs were rapidly covered with vegetation. The number of species of plants and animals which appeared without any help from man was surprising. Within a few years even trees grew up among the rubble, and provided cover for insects and birds, including rarities like the Black Redstart, several pairs of which nested and reared their young within the boundaries of the City of London.

Scientists made some interesting ecological studies of these sites, and city workers interested in natural history derived pleasure looking at them during their lunch breaks. Economic pressures have caused these oases to be destroyed, to be covered with concrete and asphalt, with buildings and car parks. Opportunities for ecological studies or rural refreshment in our cities has thus been greatly diminished.

Fortunately, however, there have been encouraging developments in the opposite direction. In 1977, in connection with the Queen's Silver Jubilee celebrations, a working party was set up to consider the use of neglected areas of land in London for community purposes. The main drive came from Max Nicholson, for many years the Director General of the British Nature Conservancy. He was chairman of the working party's Environmental Committee. This has several interesting projects in hand in various parts of the city, but the one which appeals to me is the William Curtis Ecological Park in Southwark, near the Tower Bridge and just across the Thames from the Tower of London.

Until just over a year ago this three acre site was an unattractive lorry park covered with an uneven surface of hardcore, an unpromising area for ecological study. Most of the hardcore and rubble has been removed, to be replaced with soil. This has been carefully landscaped with undulations and valleys, and a good sized pool, surrounded with marshy ground, has been constructed.

Those managing the site had difficult decisions to make—to plant or not to plant. Wartime experience showed that a good cover of plants would quickly appear without human intervention. However, they wished to encourage native species. Unfortunately disturbed sites in London, as well as in remote oceanic islands like Mauritius, or in projected National Parks in Australia, often attract the wrong species. When visiting this Park recently, I saw that the commonest plants developing on nearby waste ground were the Oxford Ragwort, a native of Italy, first recorded in England in 1794, and rapidly spread when the railways were constructed in the nineteenth century, and Buddleia, only introduced from China in about 1890, and now a rampant weed in Britain.

The Ecological Park has some areas left for spontaneous regeneration, but most of it is being carefully managed. Many native trees and shrubs have been planted, unfortunately not always successfully as the area has a surprisingly low rainfall and artificial watering is difficult. Wild flower seeds unlikely to arrive unaided have been scattered, and young plants are beginning to appear. The pond is already colonised by insects and invertebrates one might not expect to find in such a location. A kestrel nests in the one remaining large tree, all that is left from the rural countryside built over in the last century.

It will be some years before the park resembles in any way the beautiful fields and woods which once existed nearby, but it already provides unique facilities for local children, brought up in a concrete jungle, to get first hand experience of real ecological problems. Perhaps it will also inspire park authorities in other cities to set up more semi-natural areas to complement their tidy lawns and regimented rows of colourful bedding plants. There have indeed already been some such developments, in Glasgow in Scotland in particular. The virtue of the William Curtis Park is that it shows how much can be done with a small and unpromising parcel of wasteland.

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