Why International Development Neglects Indigenous Social Reality*

DAVID BUTZ
Department of Geography, McMaster University

STEVEN LONERGAN
Department of Geography, University of Victoria

BARRY SMIT
Department of Geography, University of Guelph

ABSTRACT

Development initiatives often result in degradation, rather than improvement, in the well-being of recipient communities. In part, this is because development agents lack adequate perceptions of indigenous priorities, and fail to appreciate the holistic nature of traditional rural communities. In this paper we outline, then critique, four prominent theoretical approaches to development: modernization, dependency, intermediate technology and sustainable development. We demonstrate that these theories, theories from which initiatives derive, neglect the social reality of recipient communities.

RÉSUMÉ

Souvent les entreprises de développement aboutissent à la dégradation et non à l’amélioration du bien-être des communautés. C’est en partie à cause des agents de développement qui ne connaissent pas suffisamment les priorités indigènes et n’apprécient pas le caractère holistique de ces communautés rurales traditionnelles. Dans cette étude nous résumons puis critiquons quatre approches théoriques du développement: la modernisation, la dépendance, la technologie intermédiaire et le développement durable. Nous démontrons que ces théories, dont dérivent nombre d’initiatives de développement, ne tiennent aucun compte de la réalité sociale des communautés qui en sont l’objet.

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INTRODUCTION

Failures in planned development programs are well documented. Many authors offer information on projects which were unsuccessful from the start, or which faltered after an initial period of apparent success (see Goulet, 1977; Iliffe, 1979; Carty and Smith, 1981; Thompson, Warburton and Hatley, 1986). Recently, development agencies themselves have admitted that, often, initiatives have not achieved intended long-term benefits (IUCN, 1980; CIDA, 1987).

Development failures often are documented numerically in economic, agronomic or demographic terms. While this reflects the orientation of western development agencies, it tends also to depersonalize the problem, its causes and its solutions. The effect is to anaesthetize the reader to the reality of failed development at the local level; the reality that unsuccessful development initiatives are not just failed attempts at improving conditions, but are concrete steps toward the degradation and destruction of the community. In order to ameliorate the high failure rate among development programs, it is necessary to augment numerical descriptions of material losses with qualitative understanding of social losses and to provide explanations which identify the causes of those failures in terms of both social and material degradation.

Two causes of development failures at the community level are discussed in this paper: (a) invalid or inadequate perceptions of indigenous priorities, and (b) poor understanding of the relationships among social, economic, political and ecological components of many traditional rural communities. Both of these causes stem, at least in part, from the nature of the theories which inform the policy decisions and practices of contemporary international development agencies. The accepted development theories concentrate mainly on economic factors and relegate local social and cultural circumstances to a secondary status. As if by default, they attribute contemporary western characteristics and motives to populations in developing areas. The following sections address: (a) the failure of development programs to incorporate indigenous social reality into proposed initiatives, and (b) the source of that failure in development theories.

For the purposes of this paper community is defined as a "spatially delimited set of interacting face-to-face groups" whose "everyday life in a locality is underpinned by shared values" concerning social, economic, political and ecological well-being (Eyles, 1986, p. 61; see also Matthews, 1983, pp. 154-155). In an indigenous community these shared values are likely to stem from a common inherited lifeworld (see Habermas, 1981, p. 335-337).

I. SOCIAL REALITY AND DEVELOPMENT

Firstly, development initiatives fail to identify with the consciousness of community members (see Schumacher, 1973; Bodley, 1975; Thompson, Warburton and Hatley, 1986). Development agencies set their goals according to western technocratic and bureaucratic priorities (see Stanford, 1980; Bryant and White, 1982; Whiteman, 1985). These goals commonly include increased quantity of health (e.g., reduced infant mortality), increased material wealth, improved formal education and increased agricultural productivity, expressed in dollar value
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(see Aga Khan Rural Support Program, 1986). Rural communities do not always share these goals. Often they do, but not exclusively. For example, goals may be shared, but they are shared at the expense of other less tangible aspirations. Agency decision makers tend not to consider the importance of tradeoffs among different types of wants and needs (Goulet, 1977). As a result, many initiatives conflict with local conceptions of improvement. Such initiatives are rejected or ignored by villagers, or they are accepted unwillingly. If an agency representative is persuasive enough, villagers may accept an innovation willingly, but without understanding its impact on the community (Bodley, 1975; Berman, 1982). A situation can arise where no one can predict or control the outcome of initiatives. Villagers may not understand the western innovation or initiative; nor do agency representatives often understand the desires and needs of villagers. Development policy must develop a conception of improvement that is more attuned to local circumstances. Some constructive measures have been taken in this direction. For example, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) has recently adopted an initiative to place more workers in the field, and to increase the organization’s commitment to “human resources development,” both of workers and development recipients (Beemans, 1988). This is a beginning toward greater understanding between agency personnel and development recipients.

Failure to recognize and identify with community consciousness is only one aspect of failed development attempts. A related problem stems from agency decision makers’ lack of appreciation of the holistic nature of many traditional rural communities. Decision makers are trained to confront problems from a particular disciplinary perspective, usually economic, demographic, or agronomic. Thus, they tend to perceive communities according to what Porter (1986, p. 6) describes as the “western experience of contemporary life which separates everything from everything.” This perception contrasts with the picture Porter paints of traditional kin-based societies, where individuals live “a life of wholeness and connectedness - people produce what they consume, live and deal with risk and hardship within a reinforcing system of mutual aid, and have a common set of values, life chances and life expectations” (1986, p. 1).

Porter’s descriptions of both types of society are simplistic, and his conception of kin-based societies is Utopian. Very few self-sufficient or truly subsistence economies remain. Nevertheless, anthropological and cultural-ecological case studies describe traditional rural communities in similar terms of wholeness, connectedness and integration among cultural, social, economic and ecological circumstances (Turnbull, 1962; Cole and Wolf, 1974; Ott, 1981; Staley, 1982; Hewitt, 1986). This does not mean that community integration is necessarily perfect or total. Neither does it mean that connections and integrations must be positive or reinforcing; community interrelationships are often characterized by conflict. However, these studies do suggest that, to understand the group, it is necessary to understand how community components connect to each other. As long as development agency decision makers treat problems in isolation without considering their relationships with other variables and components of community existence, they are likely to produce unexpected and undesirable long term consequences.
Deficiencies in the development process outlined above relate to the ways in which development research is conceived and accomplished. In general, international development is both "expert-driven" and positivistic. Theories of development tend to reify traditional communities in terms appropriate to western disciplinary categories (see Said, 1978), and then assess them according to quantitative, technical criteria. What is needed is an increased acceptance of the legitimacy of indigenous knowledge, and a search for development research methodologies which successfully probe the phenomenological realities of people dwelling in potential recipient communities.

II. SOCIAL REALITY AND DEVELOPMENT THEORIES

Four prominent approaches to theories of development are reviewed below and criticized for neglecting the indigenous consciousness of peoples affected by development initiatives, and for overlooking the integration among components of social existence at the community level. This review is intended to outline and critique the common orientation of a body of theory, not to represent all positions within that theoretical stance. Each body of theory contains studies which do attempt to understand the social reality of recipients. But these studies remain individual and outside the accepted dimensions of the theory from which agencies derive policy. The theories are presented as they evolved: modernization, dependency, intermediate technology, and sustainable development. Modernization and dependency theories conceptualize development-initiated change at the macro level of nations and relations among nations. Intermediate technology concentrates on micro level change. Neither of these foci are sufficient of themselves. Sustainable development theories offer at least the potential to integrate micro and macro approaches. An attempt is made to show that each new theoretical position attempts increasingly to consider the importance of social reality.

A. MODERNIZATION AND DEPENDENCY

Simply expressed, modernization theories all maintain that underdevelopment is a "consequence of some failure, deficiency or lack in the underdeveloped area" (Matthews, 1981, p. 278). This lack is perceived in terms of educational, social, economic, cultural, or environmental differences between western industrialized nations and the developing region or nation. Any or all of these differences or "deficiencies" can be overcome through processes of capitalization and industrialization similar to those which occurred in Europe, North America and Japan. Thus, poor countries can achieve wealth by adopting the production and consumption patterns of the West.

With the assistance of western economic and technological expertise, this process of development can be condensed into a brief period of rapid economic and social change. Indeed, Rostow (1971) suggests that the process of economic growth usually centres on a period of two to three decades when economy and society are transformed to the extent that economic growth is virtually automatic. This decisive period of development is termed the "take off period" (Rostow, 1971, p. 141). It is preceded by a long interval when societal preconditions for
rapid growth are established, and followed by another indefinite period characterized by "normal and automatic growth" (Rostow, 1971, p. 143).

According to modernization theorists, the task of planned development is to hasten the evolution of preconditions and facilitate the take off period. Since "take off" is most often defined as some sort of industrial revolution, its rapid success is usually tied directly to radical changes in methods of production. However, some theorists have argued that influxes of industrial technology must be supplemented with rapid input of "modern management, modern education, or one of the other modernizations" (Matthews, 1981, p. 278). Whatever western "advances" are introduced, the goal is to create economic and social conditions similar to those in currently developed nations in the hope that these conditions will achieve similar results.

Many students of development cannot accept modernization theories. They see little in common between the preindustrial internal economic and social conditions of currently developed nations and those of currently developing nations. Neither is there a recognized similarity between the international economic conditions within which the two categories developed (Frank, 1969; Freire, 1970; Laclau, 1971). Europe and North America developed because of a strong position within the international colonial political economy. Today, poor countries must develop in spite of a weak international position. Therefore, similar paths of development will not necessarily ensure favourable results. Indeed, modernization may foster dependency and lead to a regressive path of underdevelopment among poor nations, particularly within the poorest populations of those nations. This argument forms the basis of all dependency theories. In short, "underdevelopment is not a condition, but a process — the process whereby a region is made dependent" (Matthews, 1981, p. 278).

Different authors have described the process of dependency in varying terms and at different scales (Frank, 1969; Galtung, 1971; Foster-Carter, 1978; Palma, 1978; Evans, 1979; Gilbert and Haralambidis, 1984). However, all rely initially on Lenin’s theory of imperialism, which contends that capitalist structures must constantly exploit and subjugate new populations and regions to maintain a continual source of new capital. This search for capital ensures that existing nations and international capitalist elites will perpetuate themselves at the expense of underdeveloped or developing sectors. Thus, even while precapitalist populations are being helped to modernize and industrialize, they are becoming economically dependent on their capitalist benefactors. This economic dependency has its parallel in social and political dependency; elites within an underdeveloped population form "bridgeheads" with elites of the developed area (Galtung, 1971). Local elites become more socially alienated from their fellow citizens by being compromised into supporting their own country’s domination. Meanwhile, poor populations within poor nations find themselves powerless both within and outside their country.

Unlike modernization theories, dependency theories do not offer a practical evaluative framework for development. Rather, they concentrate on explaining the fundamental and specific flaws of modernization approaches. Nevertheless, dependency theorists agree that some effort from within must be made to break the cycle of economic and political reliance on dominant capitalist classes or nations. The
task of defining the mechanisms of that effort, and the potential role of develop-
ment programs, has been poorly elucidated, except by a small group of Marxist
political economists. These researchers concentrate mainly on underdeveloped
groups within developed political economies (see Fincher and Ruddick, 1983; Chouinard and Fincher, 1987).

Development policies based on modernization theories assume a common
state of non-development for all communities. This is because modernization
theories are geared toward effecting development at the macro level of nations or
broad economic regions. They ignore the existence, or at least importance, of local
priorities and deny the need to understand individual community systems. In
addition, while social attributes of community members may be identified as
inadequate, this judgement is always based on their relation to capital or capital
flows. Thus, even social conditions are viewed in an economic context. Policy
based on modernization theory tends not to recognize relationships among social,
cultural and ecological well-being except as they relate to economy, much less
acknowledge that economic indicators do not fully represent overall community
well-being. For these reasons modernization theories do not offer a foundation for
discussing sensitive evaluation of community development initiatives. Instead,
they contribute to the problems identified above.

Dependency theories offer a more comprehensive view of development,
although they too confine that view to large scale processes. Their foundation in
Marxist theory effectively combines sociological, political and economic concerns.
As a result, theorists recognize different types of dependency under dissimilar
economic, political and social circumstances, and outline the socio-economic
changes which lead to increasing dependency and alienation of specific world
classes by specific world elites. More important, dependency theorists acknowl-
dge a truly precapitalist, preindustrial state of non-development. They can con-
ceive of a situation in communities before the capitalist economic system was
relevant, and can show the process from that position toward underdevelopment
(Porter, 1987).

This is the departure point toward the recognition of indigenous communities
and their distinctive priorities apart from the dominant political economy. Unfor-
natunately, appreciation of individual non-western and non-materialist priorities is
hampered by the western urban/industrial preoccupation of most Marxist thought,
and by their macro, even global, level focus. While dependency theorists can show
how industrialization leads to underdevelopment, they cannot conceive of a solu-
tion which is not based on continued industrialization.

Dependency theorists competently describe the sociology of class struggles,
but, despite the attempts of some recent empirical political economy, they have
been unable to adequately include cultural attributes as part of a general theory.
In addition, they ignore ecology as a variable in development. It is doubtful that
an holistic approach to community development can evolve without an apprecia-
tion of culture and ecology, as well as social structures and economy. Nevertheless,
dependency theories have provided the cornerstone for most worthwhile recent
approaches to evaluating past and potential community development. That is, they
recognize underdevelopment as an important result of modernization policy. A
logical outcome of that train of thought is to effect the decoupling of economies
of underdeveloped and developed nations. Such a decoupling could provide opportunities both to incorporate indigenous aspirations and values into the development process, and to consider the ecological sustainability of a new indigenously-based development.

B. Intermediate Technology

One author who wrote very much in terms of dependency theory, without ever labelling it as such was E.F. Schumacher. However, his approach to describing the evils of dependency in *Small is Beautiful* (1973) is different to the approaches of dependency theorists. He begins by taking a global view aimed primarily at successfully capitalist nations. Indeed the first half of *Small is Beautiful* is devoted to criticizing western economics and "meta-economics."

Schumacher’s critique is thorough and useful in outlining the contradictions in modern western society between economy on the one side and culture, social structure and ecology on the other. He begins by stating that western existence is based on materialist philosophy, that is the maximization of profit, productivity and consumption. Materialism has no limiting principle. In order to succeed, it must continue to grow. Unfortunately, the environment upon which our existence is founded is strictly limited; consumption of resources, pollution of the global ecosystem, etc. cannot increase infinitely. The industrial materialist world system is intrinsically vulnerable, unresilient and ultimately unsustainable. Schumacher argues that "a way of life that bases itself on materialism, i.e. on permanent limitless expansion in a finite environment, cannot last long, and that its life expectation is the shorter the more successfully it pursues its expansionist objectives" (Schumacher, 1973, p. 123). If such a way of life is transported to a poor, non-industrialized community, these contradictions between growing consumption and finite resources remain, with the additional burden of larger populations. In addition, industrialization and materialism require great inputs of capital and technology, which must be imported to developing communities. Both also replace manual labour, which is in great supply. The result is increasing reliance on finite and imported means of production, and decreasing demand for labour, the one plentiful and indigenous means of production. Those who have nothing to sell but their labour remain in the weakest possible bargaining position (Schumacher, 1973, p. 60).

Schumacher concludes that "every increase in needs tends to increase one’s dependence on outside forces over which one cannot have control" (1973, p. 26). Implicit in that is the recognition that development should aim at maintaining or evolving a community with locally sustainable means of production. It is doubtful if a small traditional community can maintain a trade surplus, or any degree of economic self-sustainability otherwise.

A second criticism Schumacher makes against western materialist philosophy is its preoccupation with economic evaluation, and a corresponding reliance on quantification. The result, according to Schumacher, is that nothing is perceived as sacred or profane, as long as its creation or destruction can be justified by price. This, in his view, is poor economics. For example, environmental degradation is justifiable only in terms of short-term pricing, not in long-term qualitative economics. Both quantification and economic valuation have value, but are too often
linked together as the only way of approaching a problem. Schumacher condemns the primacy of quantitative economic valuation as follows:

If [economics] cannot get beyond its vast abstractions, the national income, the rate of growth, capital/output ratio, input/output analysis, labour mobility, capital accumulation; if it cannot get beyond all this and make contact with the human realities of poverty, frustration, alienation, despair, breakdown, crime, escapism, stress, congestion, ugliness and spiritual death, then let us scrap economics and start afresh (1973, p. 62).

This view may be extreme, but it reminds us that the “bottom line” is not always the bottom line. When dealing with communities which do not view life either economically or quantitatively, it is destructive to perceive their well-being in purely economic or quantitative terms.

Toward the end of his critique of materialist society, Schumacher reiterates that capitalist materialist society is based on change, growth and increasing consumption. He borrows from Buchsbaum (1959) to say “the religion of economics promotes the idolatry of rapid change, unaffected by the elementary truism that a change which is not an unquestionable improvement is a doubtful blessing” (Schumacher, 1973, p. 111). This is a simple but important statement, for it emphasizes that the burden of proof should be with the agent of change. The opposite has traditionally been the case, with catastrophic results.

In the second half of Small is Beautiful Schumacher presents a theoretical and methodological framework which he suggests will provide a measure of material wealth and spiritual well-being to the world’s poor, while avoiding the pitfalls of dependency and environmental non-sustainability. He calls the approach “intermediate technology.” It involves the development and adoption of small-scale industrial technology which requires as means of production low capital, high labour and local resources, precisely those things which are cheap and available. Intermediate technology facilitates the creation of many inexpensive workplaces to produce simple products for local consumption. Thus, what Schumacher sees as the prime agent of poverty, unemployment, is reduced, and the dependency which stems from import/export imbalance is avoided. He states that “such an intermediate technology would be immensely more productive than indigenous technology... but it would also be immensely cheaper than the sophisticated, highly capital intensive technology of modern industry” (Schumacher, 1973, p. 150). In addition, it is simple enough to be reproduced locally, and small enough not to threaten existing traditional production. It supplements the sustainability of an existing social economy.

Intermediate technology is a useful approach at the community-level. Because it conceptualizes the problem of development at the local or micro level, intermediate technology provides a framework for assessing elements of indigenous social reality. Examples from McRobie’s Small is Possible (1981) testify to its success in certain developed and developing settings. Unfortunately, Schumacher’s solution does not live up to his critical appraisal of the problem. Intermediate technology is still a western ethnocentric approach which bases improvements in economic well-being on the adoption of some industrialization and some western technology. The scale is small, local and labour intensive, which qualities allow the approach to avoid economic dependency, trade imbalance, and
labour obsolescence. Nevertheless, intermediate technology encourages the transformation of indigenous culture, economy and society into that which is based on a western materialist model. Moreover, it does not conceptualize the relationships between sustainability at the community level and larger social, political and economic trends; it has little utility for macro-level conceptualization.

It is clear that intermediate technology can help a community gain economically, but, at a practical level, no attempt is made to understand and adapt to traditional indigenous social reality. Thus, it is employed as a cure-all, with no built-in evaluation process. Despite intermediate technology's potential to facilitate a "customized" development scenario, there seems to be little effort to determine if large scale technology, or indigenous technology, or some other organizational or social change, or no change at all, is the most appropriate course. Some communities do not need intermediate technology, but merely assistance in maintaining indigenous ways of life. Others may have entirely different requirements. Some communities may still exist which are neither developed nor underdeveloped, and which require only sustainable protection from a path they do not want to take.

Solving these problems at the level of individual communities requires rigorous evaluation. Schumacher offers valuable insight into potential evaluation criteria, but does not follow through when presenting initiatives. In the end, intermediate technology offers a "fix" which is assumed to apply universally, just like modernization theories.

C. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Reference to sustainable development as a desirable, even essential objective has been appearing in policy literature since the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) included it as a first principal of their (1980) World Conservation Strategy: Living Resource Conservation For Sustainable Development. Sustainable development, however, has always been defined vaguely, if at all. Thus, it has served mainly as a popular and politically expedient recognition of the value of resources conservation, without much practical utility. Barbier, in a recent paper, expresses this clearly:

However the concept of sustainable economic development is a difficult one to grasp analytically. Given that one is attempting to describe the environmental, economic and social features of an ongoing process, the difficulty lies in arriving at a universally acceptable definition that is also analytically precise. More often than not precision is sacrificed for acceptability (1987, p. 101).

The definition offered in the IUCN report exemplifies this impression:

Development is defined here as: the modification of the biosphere and the application of human, financial, living and non-living resources to satisfy human needs and improve the quality of human life. For development to be sustainable it must take account of social and ecological factors, as well as economic ones; of the living and non-living resource base; and of the long-term as well as short-term advantages and disadvantages of alternative actions (1980, chap. 1, p. 4).
This definition is agreeable, acceptable and even in keeping with the principles of holistic and integrative evaluation of development change. However, it does not go far enough. The definition cited above, and the whole World Conservation Strategy, is a statement of principle rather than a comprehensive strategy; no framework or criteria for assessment are provided.

In short, the World Conservation Strategy (IUCN, 1980, chap. 10, p. 1) usefully expresses the belief that “unless it is guided by ecological, as well as by other environmental, and by social, cultural and ethical considerations, much development will continue to have undesired effects, to provide reduced benefits or even to fail altogether.” It also highlights the most important environmental consideration of development: the development of a scenario which is ecologically sustainable. However, it gives little indication of the active or passive role of economy, society and culture in ecologically sustainable scenarios.

Since 1980 several authors have attempted to clarify the definition of sustainable development and provide it with some analytic weight (Bartelmas, 1986; Barbier, 1987; Brown, 1987; Redclift, 1987; World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). This has meant downplaying environmental concerns somewhat and increasing the importance of economic considerations. While preoccupation with economics is equally hazardous as preoccupation with environment, in this case the shift has been positive. Perhaps the best example of this shift is found in Barbier’s (1987) article “The Concept of Sustainable Economic Development.”

Barbier (1987, p. 101) begins by stating that it is “extremely difficult if not impossible to define sustainable development in any analytically rigorous way,” but that “there is still a need to describe its characteristics and to distinguish it from other concepts of development.” He proposes that the first step toward a practical interpretation of the term is an understanding of and emphasis on the unique environmental, economic, and social features of sustainability. By making sustainability into an economic and social problem, he distances the concept from conservationist rhetoric, and affiliates it with the social concept of dependency.

Barbier (1987, p. 103) bases his argument on the premise that “many environmental problems in developing countries originate from the lack of development, that is from the struggle to overcome extreme conditions of poverty.” The main task of sustainable development, then, is to ensure that all people have access to sustainable and secure livelihoods. He maintains that “the primary objective is reducing the absolute poverty of the world’s poor through providing lasting and secure livelihoods that minimize resource depletion, environmental degradation, cultural disruption, and social instability” (Barbier, 1987, p. 103). The achievement of that objective relates to four criteria of sustainable economic development, which are distinguishable from the characteristics of economic development as conventionally understood. These criteria are (Barbier, 1987):

1. Sustainable economic development is indistinguishable from the total development of society and cannot effectively be analysed separately, as “sustainability” depends on the interaction of economic changes with social, cultural, and ecological, transformations.

2. The quantitative dimension of sustainable development is associated with increases in the material means available to those living, or destined to live, in
absolute poverty, so as to provide for adequate physical and social well-being and security against becoming poorer.

3. The qualitative dimension of sustainable development is multifaceted and is associated with ensuring the long-term ecological, social, and cultural potential for supporting economic activity and structural change.

4. Sustainable development is not easily subject to measurement; the quantitative and qualitative dimensions are mutually reinforcing and inseparable, and thus cannot be fully captured by any concept of direct and measurable economic gain.

Even after providing useful criteria for describing sustainable economic development, Barbier fails to offer a detailed plan for its achievement. However, he does offer some general methodological comments which may be used in the implementation and evaluation of initiatives. He suggests that since sustainability depends on the interaction of social, economic, cultural and ecological variables, and since these interactions are poorly suited to quantitative measurement, it is important to consider tradeoffs amongst variables. Decisions concerning development initiatives then, should be based on the relative merits of possible tradeoffs. The general objective of the evaluation process is to "maximize the goals across all these systems through an adaptive process of tradeoffs" (Barbier, 1987, p. 104).

Barbier provides an understanding that development must create or maintain a system that is sustainable in economic, ecological and social terms. The value of this has been emphasized in other sustainable development literature (see Bartelmas, 1986; Canadian International Development Agency, 1987; Redclift, 1987; Gow and Morss, 1988; Bebbington and Carney, 1990; International Development Research Centre, 1990). In addition, he describes the characteristics of the process of sustainable development. He does not attempt to define the spatial or social parameters of a sustainable system; nor does he describe, except in the vaguest terms, the necessary criteria of a sustainable system.

The conceptualizations of Barbier and other recent sustainable development theorists (see Nelson, 1984; Gow and Morss, 1988; Roots, 1989) offer at least the beginnings of an holistic, multi-level theory with some basis in indigenous reality. These potential qualities stem from sustainable development's ties to empirical, locale-based ecological and cultural ecological literature (Bebbington and Carney, 1990). Ecological literature stresses interdependence among various vertical levels (micro to macro) of a biophysical system. Good cultural ecology expands those vertical relationships to include social, economic and political sub-systems, and explores the horizontal integration among the sub-systems that comprise a community. Cultural ecology also tends to emulate the ethnographic tradition of trying to determine what indigenous peoples "think they are up to" in their relations with their environment - a positive first step toward recognizing the legitimacy of indigenous knowledge (Bebbington and Carney, 1990, pp. 42-43).

Since the publication of the World Commission on Environment and Development report Our Common Future in 1987 the concept of sustainable development has received considerable attention, and has been approached from a variety of theoretical directions. While a variety of approaches to sustainable development have been pursued, so far the tendency of sustainable development literature has been to seek an understanding of systems integration in quantitative, positivistic
terms which, not incidentally, perpetuate the predominance of "expert" knowledge (Roots, 1989; Westburg, 1989; Bebbington and Carney, 1990; Brooks, 1990; Manning, 1990). This particular approach to achieving integration among vertical and horizontal components has undermined the potential for establishing an understanding of a more phenomenological community consciousness. Several authors recognize this tendency as problematic and call for heightened emphasis on integrating social theory and ethnographic research with conventional economic and ecological sustainability research (see Redclift, 1987; Bebbington and Carney, 1990, p. 43). Some development agencies have responded by moving toward decentralizing their administrative structure, placing more employees in the field, and hiring local "experts" (Canadian International Development Agency, 1987; Gow and Morss, 1988, p. 1407; International Development Research Centre, 1990). These moves have the potential to link development more closely to indigenous reality, but only if there is a corresponding change in perceptions of sustainability and the role of community in sustainability at the level of development theory and policy. That change has been slow to come, at least from within the international development industry.

CONCLUSION

The four prominent approaches to theories of development outlined above show a lack of understanding and concern for indigenous community consciousness, and of appreciation for the integration among social, political, economic and ecological aspects of community existence. They also neglect the need to assess and integrate development at a number of levels, from household to global political economic system. The conception of sustainable development comes close to the sort of integrated approach that is needed. But the contribution of sustainable development is largely rhetorical. What is needed is a new approach to development which considers the consciousness of community members, which incorporates the integrated pattern of material and non-material relations which comprise social existence at the community level, and which has the theoretical rigour to relate community level circumstances to sub-systemic attributes operating at higher and lower levels. This new approach to community development must come to terms theoretically with the how and why of individuals' actions (and not just in terms of their economy or ecology, but socially as well), and must suggest efficient methods for discovering the specific hows and whys of particular indigenous groups. It should also identify a goal for development efforts that is relevant and desirable to the range of indigenous consciousness. Finally, it should be able to suggest courses of action (or inaction) that effectively link peoples' hows and whys to a guiding development goal. Such an approach must be informed not only by conventional theories of development, but by empirical ethnographic and sociological work, and by theories of social change.

The sustainable development literature offers the foundation of an approach which could incorporate an emphasis on indigenous social reality; an approach which identifies community sustainability, the result, rather than sustainable development, the process, as the dominant theme. The virtue of sustainability is gaining credence among development agencies. Members of indigenous communities in
developing countries also strive for community sustainability, and individual sustainability within that community. Indeed, many ethnological and sociological studies describe strategies employed by indigenous groups to maintain the sustainability of their community in the face of internal and external stresses (see Turnbull, 1962; Cole and Wolf, 1974; Matthews, 1981, 1983; Rigby, 1985; Thompson, Warburton and Hatley, 1986). Strategies are often described as belonging to one (or several) of four interrelated spheres of activity and organization: social, economic, political and ecological (Matthews, 1983). The challenge, then, is to define community sustainability in terms of these four spheres, and to identify characteristics of social sustainability, economic sustainability, political sustainability, and ecological sustainability within potential recipient communities.

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