PUTTING THE CULTURE BACK INTO DEVELOPMENT

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PART I: WHY CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT?

A growing record of failed attempts to initiate socio-economic development in the Third World[1] has led development professionals to question the theories and methods which have guided their interventions. The search for more appropriate models only intensifies as the litany of development disasters lengthens. An introspective literature tracks development history from the age of faith in the promise of gross national product (GNP) growth, through the campaign for basic human needs, to the current fashion for micro-enterprise promotion. Such surveys of failure typically culminate with "the answer." Another panacea is offered, a new solution to save development.

Rather than imitate this process, this article offers an idea that is a critical missing link in the development process. The neglected dimension is culture. Culture and development share three important characteristics: each is complex, dynamic, and learned. It will be shown that to ignore these characteristics in the policy process is to imperil development efforts. But acknowledgement is not enough. When incorporated at the outset of policy, traditional[2] culture can play a positive role as *facilitator* for development.

The idea of integrated approaches to Third World development is not new. But despite praise for cross-disciplinary cooperation in development planning, distressingly few policies are solidly built on concepts of development as a complex human process. Effective development policy responds to, as well as affects, change toward factors in the disparate realms of economics, politics, culture, and physical environment. Changes in each of these areas affects

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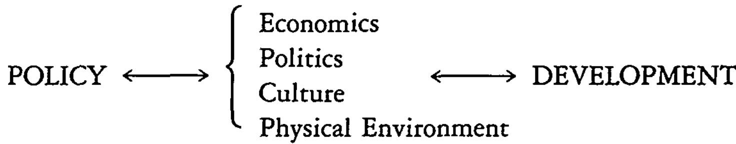
1. The author admits some problems with this term: it implies uncomfortable and inaccurate divisions of the globe, in addition to artificially ascribing to one category nations of tremendous diversity. Despite its limitations, however, "Third World" is preferable to "developing countries" because the latter implies that *some* countries (presumably the 1st and 2nd worlds) are *not* developing. The author believes that underdevelopment exists even in the United States, and needs for development amidst modernity should not be obscured with presumptuous terminology. "LDCs" (less developed countries) and "underdeveloped countries" will be used interchangeably with "Third World" and given commonly understood meaning.
2. "Traditional" is taken to mean whatever exists in a society's cultural fabric — whether it is judged as "pure" or a mixture of newly-assimilated factors with the ancient — and actively affects or characterizes society. S.N. Eisenstadt's more formally defines tradition as: " . . . the constellation of the codes, the guidelines, which delineate the limits of the binding cultural order . . . which prescribes the 'proper' choices of goals and patterns of behavior . . . ." in *Tradition, Change and Modernity* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1973), 139.

development which in turn has renewed impact on those developmental domains.



(figure 1)

Recognizing the intricate interrelationships among various aspects of development, highlighting its fundamentally human (rather than economic or technical) nature, and demonstrating that development interventions can never be a one-step endeavor, will underscore the critical role of culture in this discussion.

The primary aim, however, is to illuminate the missing link. Development policy formation and implementation fatally neglect the cultural dimension. The proof of this is glaring when one examines the thread running through a wide diversity of failed interventions. Policies that ignore powerful cultural realities within the target society are flawed from the outset; interventions unadapted to the local culture lack sustainability, and may be entirely ineffective, if not harmful.

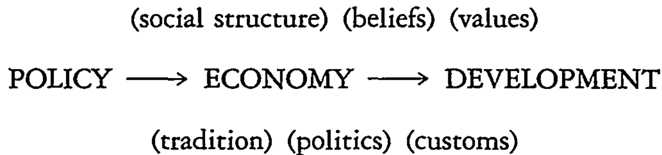
An analogy will help illustrate the role of culture. Think of culture as the weather through which a pilot (development practitioner) must navigate. Just as the pilot can not "wish away" the weather and must navigate around the fog or headwinds, a development practitioner who ignores cultural variables will, at best, be deterred or delayed from reaching a goal, and may be prematurely terminated at an unexpected locale. Culture, therefore, like the weather, cannot be ignored by someone who wants to make progress through a society. Every act, whether political, economic, technical, or legal, takes place in a "cultural atmosphere," an atmosphere that defines and sustains all activity within it.

Furthermore, our pilot could navigate through the weather, not only avoiding some headwinds, but catching some tailwinds to aid progress. Herein lies the most neglected component of the culture-development relationship. Not only must we accommodate cultural realities when we attempt to introduce positive change in foreign settings, we can actually utilize items from traditional culture to facilitate development.

Views on Culture and Development Relationships

Culture Does Not Affect Development

The majority of development economists ignore socio-cultural factors entirely. The implication, sometimes stated explicitly, is that human variables have no impact on the implementation of economic development models. This view is represented graphically as follows:



(figure 2)

Such policymakers assume, among other things, that profit/consumption maximization is a universal economic principle. But as a provocative article by Marshall Sahlins suggests, not all behavior is guided by such principles.[3] Projects based on this kind of approach fail to account for local influences on people. They are "often viewed out of context, as isolated abstractions in and of themselves rather than as interventions affecting people who have unique histories, locations, and cultures."[4]

Some enlightened development economists will admit that certain peculiarities in a society will alter the results of policy interventions. Invariably, however, these concessions are nullified by the conclusion that such "soft" variables as religious beliefs, kinship values, and perceived political pressures cannot be adequately measured. Because they are unquantifiable, these variables — although essential to development — are irrelevant for the economic expert. The intransigence of economists' exclusive faith in numbers amounts to a subcultural trait that acts as an obstacle to development.

The fact is, economics is a *social* science, and therefore dependent on myriad human variables. Hans J. Daeng, in a study of competitive feasting in Indonesia, argues that "human behavior of a social, ceremonial, or religious nature is not necessarily unrelated or irrelevant to behavior that is economic and ecological in nature"[5]. Government policy-makers condemned the massive traditional feasts as wasteful and wanted to outlaw them in the name of development. Culturally attuned observation revealed important economic functions the "irrational" feasts performed for the society. Not only did the event define social status and adjudicate land disputes,[6] a critical redistribution of resources occurred as a result of the feasting, which regulated "the balance among people, livestock and land, and by thus safeguarding the health of the environment, safeguarded the productivity of the agricultural system that depended on this environment."[7]

3. A study of semi-nomadic hunter-gatherer societies reveals values on material possessions and definitions of wealth that contrast dramatically with Western notions. The policy implications for development planners in much of Africa are enormous. See Marshall Sahlins, "The Original Affluent Society," in *Stone Age Economics* (Hawthorne, N. Y.: Aldine, 1972), 1-39.

4. Lawrence F. Salmen, *Listen to the People: Participant-Observer Evaluation of Development Projects* (New York: published for the World Bank Oxford University Press, 1987), 7.

5. "Ritual Feasting and Resource Competition in Flores," *The Real and Imagined Role of Culture in Development: Case Studies from Indonesia*, ed., Michael Dove (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988), 266.

6. Daeng, 260.

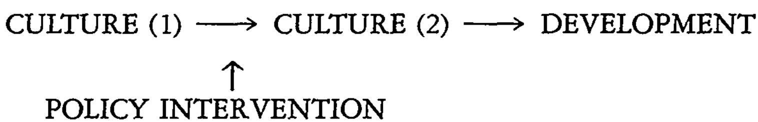
7. Ibid., 266. The same point is made in a study by Marvin Harris of competitive feasts among Vancouver Island indians, "Potlatch," in *Cows, Pigs, Wars and Witches* (Random House, 1974).

One lesson to be drawn is that economic policy-makers should develop a more sophisticated view of the functions (both manifest and latent) performed by traditional customs and beliefs. This type of analysis would highlight the interrelatedness of many different components of society. Changes in economic policy obviously affect other domains of culture. More subtly, the resulting effects may subsequently influence the economy, thus creating unexpected outcomes.

Professionals from other disciplines also have a tendency to define actions in terms of their specific disciplines, missing the web-like interrelatedness of all aspects of society. Parasitic diseases, for example, cannot be eradicated without considering the national economy and the indigenous spirituality. Political systems cannot be opened up without understanding the material aspirations of the elite. Law cannot be modernized without understanding tribal dispute resolution. Agriculture cannot develop by externally designed plans which ignore local soil conditions and land ownership concepts. Changes in any one of these diverse domains affect and are affected by conditions in the other spheres. That the relationships are difficult to discern does not make them any less powerful. It does demand greater rigor in obtaining information *prior to* policy design. The information overlooked most of all involves cultural variables.

Culture is an Obstacle to Development

The first of a variety of views admitting a relationship between culture and development asserts that traditional culture plays a negative role in the development process. That is, un-modern values or customs are obstacles to development. Therefore, the goal of policy is to change culture in order to foster development. Hence, cultural development precedes economic and political development. This relationship is depicted as follows:



(figure 3)

Some "culture as obstacle" views are influenced by the "culture of poverty" theory, which posits that poverty stems from a set of inherited and self-perpetuating cultural traits. The anthropologist Oscar Lewis, who coined the phrase, became intimately involved with his subjects. He associated certain social-psychological characteristics of the individual, family, and community with economic poverty.[8] Interpreted as a causal explanation for poverty, the "culture of poverty" thesis leads to a somewhat hostile assessment for action:

8. See Oscar Lewis, "The Culture of Poverty," in *On Understanding Poverty*, ed. Daniel P. Moynihan (New York: Basic Books, 1968).

If these cultural traits are the *cause* of poverty, then the victims are to blame, and they — rather than social structure — must be changed.

An economist and an anthropologist writing in the late 1960s[9] wisely asserted that the local culture must be taken into account in order to achieve successful development. But DeGregori and Pi-Sunyer accept the causal explanations of the culture of poverty theory. They claim the "cultural inertia" described by Lewis combines with technological shortcomings to create obstacles which must be "overcome" in order to develop.[10] They unqualifiably assume the inherent value and necessity of "industrial habits of mind"[11] and consider the usage of indigenous rather than European languages in LDC schools "a burden."[12] These views exemplify the paternalism and ethnocentrism of scholars and development professionals typical during the first "development decade."

A more recent publication by Lawrence Harrison presents a similar view of culture as an obstacle to development.[13] In promoting his theory of inferior culture as the cause for underdevelopment, Harrison condemns as "Marxist-Leninists and third world nationalists" those who would explain underdevelopment at least in part through the experience of subjugation and resource extraction under colonialism.[14] Dependency theory, he says, is a "paralyzing, self-defeating mythology."[15] Notwithstanding weaknesses of the *dependencista* approach, Harrison neglects the most fundamental characteristic of culture: it is learned.[16] All culture is naturally adaptive, inherently dynamic[17] as it responds to changing environments. In the case of Latin America, Harrison explicitly defines the cultural characteristics inhibiting development as Hispanic. His careful analysis traces problematic attitudes, habits and beliefs to the Iberian peninsula, forging a direct correlation between the Hispanic mindset and underdevelopment.[18]

The striking thing about this linkage is that, regardless of its truth, it disproves his opening claim that colonialism does not explain development.

9. Thomas R. DeGregori and Oriol Pi-Sunyer, *Economic Development: The Cultural Context* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1969).
10. Ibid., 103.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., 125.
13. See Lawrence Harrison, *Underdevelopment is a State of Mind: the Latin American Case* (Lanham, Md: University Press of America, 1985).
14. Ibid., 1.
15. Ibid.
16. Culture can be defined as the total body of tradition borne by a society and transmitted from generation to generation, through which groups learn to organize their behavior and thought in relation to their environment. *See* Robert F. Murphy, *Cultural and Social Anthropology: An Overture* 2 (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1979), 14, 24; and Michael C. Howard, *Contemporary Cultural Anthropology* 3 (Boston: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1989), 4. Howard also says, "Most of what goes into making up culture is a result of learning — modifying behavior in response to experience within an environment," 5. For classic theoretical grounding on this point, see readings of Franz Boas on historical particularism, and theorists from the diffusionist school, late nineteenth, early twentieth centuries.
17. Michael Dove, *The Real and Imagined Role of Culture in Development: Case Studies from Indonesia*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988), 6.
18. Ibid., 168.

By clearly labeling the inhibiting traits "Hispanic," he essentially proves that colonialism was the problem: without colonization, there would have been no hispanicization. Contemporary Latin Americans learned their habits and attitudes from the Spanish.

Research findings on indigenous populations in the Americas which reveal highly complex, productive, and rational social systems buttress this argument. The Inca and Aztec states are the obvious examples. Smaller groups in the Andean highlands also orchestrated finely-tuned social, economic, and political organizations that reflected a complex agricultural system designed to optimize productivity in ingenious ways. The way Indians successfully met the challenges of an environment characterized by harshness and extremes was undeniably rational.[19] Indigenous peoples everywhere[20] knew their environment and knew how to adapt to it optimally. Their cultures reflected their knowledge and abilities, which cannot be said of the European culture derivatives forced unnaturally upon them. Regardless of how well Hispanic culture explains Latin America's problems, then, we must remember that those qualities are not inherent and static. On the contrary, those cultural traits are reasonable adaptations to a variety of experiences, especially colonization.

Harrison's views echo those of Max Weber and Gunnar Myrdal, who highlight the role of the Protestant ethic as a cultural force behind modernization.[21] They argued that the rational mindset, creative capacity, and other Protestant values associated with modern culture fueled development for the West, while the absence of these cultural values stifled progress in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.[22]

In contrast, Robert Packenham[23] and Howard Wiarda[24] examined the divergent histories of North America and the Third World and found much to explain current political philosophy, economic conditions, and cultural values. The policy implications of their research are clear. One can not expect North American culture to be replicated by simple government programming when the very basis for it does not exist.

In sum, it can be suggested of the "culture as obstacle" school that the view itself is an obstacle to development. Insofar as it directs energy toward changing practices unlikely to respond in a predictable fashion, it misses the

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19. See for example, Ricardo A. Godoy, "Ecological Degradation and Agricultural Intensification in the Andean Highlands," *Human Ecology* 12 (1984): 359-83; Steven Webster, "Native Pastoralism in the South Andes," *Ethnology* 12 (April 1973): 115-33; Benjamin S. Orlove and Ricardo Godoy, "Sectoral Fallowing Systems in the Central Andes," *Journal of Ethnobiology* 6 (Summer 1986): 169-203; and the writings of John Murra.

20. The world's rainforests also provide excellent illustrations of environmental adaptation. See for example, readings in *People of the Tropical Rainforest*, eds., Julie Sloan Denslow and Christine Padoch, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

21. Ibid., 19-21.

22. Ibid, 2; and Gunnar Myrdal, *Asian Drama: an Inquiry Into the Poverty of Nations*, an abridgment by Seth S. King, (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 48-53.

23. Robert Packenham, *Liberal America and the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), chapter three, 111-160.

24. Howard Wiarda, *Politics and Social Change in Latin America: the Distinct Tradition* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1982).

opportunity to capitalize upon socio-cultural features which could be redirected in positive ways.[25]

Culture is Sacred

Others, regardless of whether they believe culture hinders or helps development, advocate its preservation. This view is more commonly represented by some traditional anthropologists[26] and culture enthusiasts who have perhaps over-romanticized traditional cultures, and advocate a hands-off respect for indigenous people at the expense of development.

Development Must Adapt to Culture

A small but inspiring body of literature presents culture in a neutral light, neither inhibiting nor sacred, and asserts its significance to the outcome of development interventions. These authors conclude that project implementation should adapt to the local cultural conditions as well as possible. While many proponents of this perspective come from the field of applied anthropology, others trained in development studies have adopted this perspective.[27] Applied anthropologists have been advising governments and private agencies for the past three decades, devising creative ways to adapt externally-derived plans to local cultural realities. Development practitioners have even designed a handbook of adapting projects to the local culture.[28]

As early as the 1930s, the International African Institute, a body of anthropologists which advised colonial administrators, sought cultural "knowledge as the basis of enlightened policies." They promoted understanding about African societies so that induced changes would be less disruptive for the indigenous culture.[29] Theirs was a "sympathetic interpretation" of African social institutions which encouraged policies that built upon rather than abruptly replaced them.[30]

Today, groups like Cultural Survival[31] perform similar work as advocates for cultural minorities around the world. They too focus on "closing the information gap" by transmitting two-way information between indigenous groups and governments or private agencies whose projects affect a powerless minority. In so doing, Cultural Survival hopes to heighten the element of choice available to indigenous people confronting "development" and to sensitize policy-makers to the human impact of their interventions.

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25. For interesting accounts of Third World nationals who, despite being colonized themselves, express the same view of culture as an obstacle to development, see Rene Dumont, *False Start in Africa*, (New York: Praeger, 1969); and Lawrence Harrison, 21, on W.A. Lewis.
26. Although certainly not all of them.
27. For example, Conrad Arensberg, Arthur Neihoff, David Pitt.
28. Conrad Arensberg and Arthur Niehoff, *Introducing Social Change: A Manual for Community Development*, 2d ed. (Chicago: Aldine, 1971).
29. Lucy Mair, *Anthropology and Social Change* (London: The Athlone Press), 3.
30. Ibid., 13.
31. A non-profit organization based in Cambridge, Mass.

Other applied anthropologists are more activist, attempting to induce change themselves, rather than just responding to proposed change. Allan Holmberg and his team from Cornell, who took over the administration of the VICOS hacienda in Peru to do development as well as research, represent the classic example.[32] As "change agents,"[33] they induced dramatic changes, but were deeply grounded in a cultural perspective.

Notwithstanding these efforts, the valuable insights and skills of applied anthropologists rarely have penetrated the ranks of mainstream development. A self-imposed isolation in an elitist academic discipline by anthropologists combined with a harsh unreceptiveness by development practitioners to create a communication gap.[34] The tension and lack of cooperation between anthropologists and development administrators is explained further by fundamentally different definitions of "development," different goals, and different opinions about the pace of "progress."[35]

Yet on the policy side, a cultural perspective is quietly emerging. For example, the World Health Organization recently recommended that LDCs seek ways to incorporate traditional healers into national health plans,[36] recognizing that cooperation, rather than conflict, will foster sustainable improvement in health. Also, the World Bank recently experimented with cultural emersion as a technique to more accurately evaluate projects.[37]

Culture Can Facilitate Development

The thesis of this paper charges one step beyond that of enlightened change agents who inform policy with cultural reality and adapt interventions to local culture. Culture is not only something that must be accommodated, it is something that can be engineered for development.[38] The key to assuring such

32. See a vast array of articles each by Allan Holmberg, and Henry Dobyns on VICOS.
33. This term is used in some of the development literature to represent the development practitioners who are involved with implementing changes in communities. They are the ones who introduce and promote ideas or techniques which otherwise would not have been present.
34. Barbara Pillsbury, "Making a Difference: Anthropologists in International Development," in Walter Goldschmidt, ed., *Anthropology and Public Policy: A Dialogue*, (Washington, D.C., American Anthropological Association, 1984), 12-13.
35. For further discussion of these relationships, see Allan Hoben, "Anthropologists in Development," in *Annual Review of Anthropology*, ed. B. Siegel, (Palo Alto, Ca.: Annual Reviews, 1982); and for a personal account of problems inherent between anthropologists and bureaucrats and technicians, see Janice Sacherer, "Applied Anthropology and the Development Bureaucracy: Lessons from Nepal," in *Practicing Development Anthropology*, ed. Edward C., Green, (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1986); and for an early example of these conflicts from colonial Africa, see Lucy Mair, *Anthropology and Social Change* (London: Athlone, 1969), 13.
36. Edward C. Green, "The Integration of Modern and Traditional Health Sectors in Swaziland," in Robert M. Wulff and Shirley J. Fiske, *Anthropological Praxis: Translating Knowledge into Action*, (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1987), 88.
37. Salmen.
38. It should be noted that an important relationship between culture and development consists of the impact of the latter on the former. All relationships analyzed here work in the opposite direction. The effects of development intervention on culture are myriad, fascinating, and critically important. They have, however, been abundantly studied and analyzed by anthropologists and other social scientists, so that particular dimension to culture and development will not be addressed here.

If inherent capabilities can be exposed and employed effectively, then vulnerabilities may fall naturally away as a result. Focusing on the idea of capacity-enhancing, one practitioner argues, "A project's success is directly related to how much encouragement is given to people's on-going self-improvement processes."[42] When capacities are creatively harnessed, "it becomes a catalyst for self-improvement and the development it achieves becomes self-generating."[43] If vulnerabilities are defined as needs, suffering, and problems, and if capacities are understood as talent, skills, and knowledge which exist within a given population, the goal of development interventionists should be to find vulnerabilities and capacities and then determine the most cost-effective ways to variously erode and build.[44]

Wiarda notes the primary importance of cultural relativity in defining real development:

> We have made the mistake of assuming that development necessarily means Westernization. That is not only wrong and inappropriate, contributing to a perpetuation of our lack of comprehension regarding other culture areas, but it represents some of the worse forms of what we might call cultural imperialism.[45]

Hence, ethnocentrism marks not only the means with which we intervene, but the very goals and definitions that guide western-induced development. We should think more critically about what we really want to achieve. If we discover that the subject people have the same objectives, then we must look to their culture to find the best ways to reach those shared objectives.

Vital to this endeavor, of course, is the primary involvement of the subject people in the process of evaluating their vulnerabilities and capabilities.[46] If newly introduced information and innovations lack meaning for the beneficiaries, the benefits will not last. For something new to be meaningful, people must play a role in the assimilation process. Only ideas and questions should be taken into the field, not detailed plans. Adherence to this simple guideline for local participation in development would reverse the trend of many failed "top down" interventions. Geertz's definition of culture is helpful. Culture is a system of shared meanings.[47] Lacking meaning for the beneficiaries, innovations can not lead to real development.

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42. Salmen, 71.
43. Ibid., 70.
44. A well-constructed and experience-tested framework using these concepts comes from Mary B. Anderson and Peter Woodrow at the Harvard Graduate School of Education's International Relief/Development Project, Cambridge, Mass.
45. Howard J. Wiarda, ed. *Politics and Social Change in Latin America: The Distinct Tradition*, (University of Massachusetts Press, 1982), 11.
46. The importance of local participation in projects to produce sustainable development has become a virtual truism in development. Still, for many "top down" planners, the reminder is necessary.
47. Clifford Geertz defines culture as "An ordered system of meaning and of symbols, in terms of which social interaction takes place" and further as the "fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their action." *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

facilitation is obtaining information and incorporating it creatively into culture-specific policies. The "culture as facilitator" approach is depicted in figure 4.

CULTURE ⟶ INFORMATION ⟶ POLICY ⟶ DEVELOPMENT

(figure 4)

PART II: DEMONSTRATING THE LINK BETWEEN CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT

Defining Development, Underdevelopment, and Culture

The terminology used in this discussion is deeply subjective, and much of the thesis is based on atypical definitions of development. "Mainstream development" refers to prevalent approaches, embodied in most government and nongovernmental organization (NGO) policies, which assume Western standards for "progress" and are measured primarily by macroeconomic indicators. This is distinguished from the author's conception of development which is defined as the process of reducing vulnerabilities and enhancing capacities so that, in the view of the subject people, their lives are improved.

Directed development (i.e., involving external change agents)[39] is called for in situations of true poverty, or un-development. Briefly, "true" poverty is not merely an economic status, it is characterized by a diverse set of social-psychological, political and economic, cultural, and spiritual conditions. It can be thought of as a situation where basic rights, as described by Henry Shue,[40] are not fulfilled. True poverty, as opposed to economic poverty, is synonymous with un-development, which might be thought of as dis-development. This term connotes a dynamic process of *becoming* undeveloped, suggesting the possibility that development has been lost. This contrasts with the view of underdevelopment as a "primitive" state, or as a lower point on a unilineal evolutionary path.[41]

A key concept in this definition of poor/undeveloped is vulnerability. People living in poverty are economically, politically, physically, and culturally vulnerable. Much of the difficulty in developing naturally stems from vulnerability. Therefore, induced development necessarily focuses on decreasing vulnerabilities. When people face fewer vulnerabilities in their environment, confidence increases, and natural creative abilities will be released. This is not to imply that vulnerabilities must be diminished before capabilities can be enhanced — on the contrary — the two processes are mutually reinforcing.

39. It is recognized that development also happens naturally, i.e., without intervention from external sources.

40. Henry Sue, *Basic Rights: Subsistence, Affluence and U.S. Foreign Policy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980). The key criterion here is malnutrition due to inadequate access to food. In addition to subsistence, Shue delineates security and liberty (narrowly defined) as "basic rights." Those are the only three kinds of rights whose enjoyment is essential to the enjoyment of any other right.

41. This dynamic interpretation of "un-development" parallels the learned and adaptive nature of culture.

The Role of Cultural Variables

Implicit within the foregoing definition of development is the importance of cultural variables. Of course, even in natural development, culture plays a role. Most of the world's development has come not through planned interventions, but by diffusion, a process of assimilating new techniques or ideas through contact with exogenous peoples. New ways are adopted at a gradual pace, by choice. "Social groups do not borrow indiscriminately; they borrow what will best fit the pattern of their own culture or will disturb that pattern least."[48] Then the new item is revised to fit the traditional context.

Artificially induced change, almost by definition, is more difficult to sustain than change welling naturally from within a society. Development planners could increase prospects for success if they sought the types of variables which fostered successful natural development and harnessed them for project design. Most of these variables will be cultural.

Every professional knows of examples where projects failed because one particular component was neglected. Too often, the strategy overlooked cultural variables.

A forestry project in Haiti exemplifies this tendency. Consumption of wood for fuel on a massive scale was creating serious problems. Project planners devised a planting scheme that would secure future supply and check erosion. After planting, however, the locals would graze their animals at night on the tender new trees' leaves; or, they would market the wood of mature trees to earn private income. The project planners did not realize that the Haitians would not value the conservation project. Fortunately, an anthropologist was hired. He advised that the forestry project must be presented in meaningful terms to the people. Reforestation must be promoted as a direct benefit, in this case, as an income-generating venture rather than a conservation effort. When the beneficiaries realized they could profit personally within three to four years, they cooperated energetically. A simple redefinition of the goal to fit the local culture transformed this project from a failure to a success.[49]

Motivation: Why People Do and Do Not Change

By asking the questions "Why do people change?" and "Why do people resist change?" we gain a greater understanding of culture, and thus move closer to policy recommendations for sound development.

- Demonstrability/Tangibility

The power of tangible, demonstrable benefits to induce change is particularly notable in non-industrial societies. Rarely do people reject technology which has obvious labor-saving or financial value. "When change is not forced on a

48. Conrad Arensberg and Arthur Niehoff, *Introducing Social Change: A Manual for Community Development*, 2d ed., (Chicago: Aldine, 1971), 77.
49. Also at the anthropologist's suggestion, informal local social networks were mobilized for implementation, which were much more effective than the usual government channels which typically elicited little response; Pillsbury, 16-17.

people, they are much more apt to borrow ideas of a technological nature than those of social organization or the supernatural."[50] An example of this is how readily firearms were assimilated by people conquered by European imperialists. In contrast, the assimilation of Christianity was turbulent. It resulted largely from the use of force and the depopulation of indigenous people.[51]

The health field provides other examples. The obvious, quick benefits of antibiotics, oral rehydration mixtures, and pain killers cause them to be readily accepted all over the Third World. Nutrition education, however, is a common difficulty. People do not see the health benefits of eating fruits and vegetables. Reluctance to accept this kind of preventative medicine is exacerbated by cultural concepts of what makes a person feel "full" as well as the social value of eating animal products.

• Cost-Benefit Analysis

Another important dimension of motivation for change is the rational, cost-benefit analysis that is universally, if unconsciously, undergone. Even deeply-held spiritual beliefs will be overridden if the practical benefit of change is great enough. The Yir Yoront are Australian aborigines whose lives are guided by a mythology which says everything in this life mirrors the life of their ancestors. This concept prevented the Yir Yoront from adopting the canoe, which was introduced with obvious benefits to neighboring people. Since Yir Yoront ancestors had no canoes, the contemporaries could not have them. There was no place in their world view for the canoe. Their reception of the steel axe was different, however, because of its exceptional labor-saving value. The fact that the tools came free of cost from Western missionaries was added incentive for the aborigines to adopt the axe. The benefits were tremendous and overrode the only apparent cost: incongruity with traditional beliefs.[52]

The government of Indonesia promotes irrigated rice cultivation among swidden[53] cultivators, because this technique brings a higher return per unit of land. Governments have tried, and failed, to replace swidden agriculture since colonial times, because the swidden cultivators do not value production per unit of land. Rather, they are concerned about production per unit of labor. Swidden is the preferred system, as it optimizes their labor resources. In this context, they see no rational alternative to their system, and all government efforts have been wasted.[54] If officials began to think in terms of

50. Arensberg and Niehoff, 76.

51. Ibid.

52. Lauriston Sharp, "Steel Axes for Stone-Age Australians," *Human Organization* 14 (1952): 17-22. It is important to note that the cost of assimilating the innovation was much higher than anticipated. The subsequent effects of the steel axe in this society were multitude and disastrous, negatively affecting virtually every domain of culture. But the economic/labor benefits, being tangible, were much easier to evaluate than the subtle, albeit far-reaching, cultural factors. The latter were invisible to the people, at least initially. Sharp's study of social change in this case exemplifies the vast work done by anthropologists on the impact of development on culture.

53. Known as, "slash and burn."

54. Jeffery D. Brewer, "Traditional Land Use and Government Policy in Bima, East Sumbawa," in Dove, ed., 133.

what the farmers value, in this case labor resources rather than land, then they would be more likely to develop viable alternatives to swidden.

Moreover, not only does the tangibility of the benefit presented determine whether or not project beneficiaries adopt change, the cost-benefit ratio as perceived by the subject plays an important role. In the end, it may not be the price of fertilizer versus the return on cocoa yields which determines the Ghanaian farmer's cooperation with a World Bank-sponsored agricultural development program. Instead, contrary to "expert" calculations from Washington, the farmer may not cooperate because of kinship values and the affect on familial relationships caused by policy-induced changes in division of labor or domicile.

These kinds of variables can be very powerful in determining the cooperation of project "beneficiaries." Typical cost-benefit analyses that neglect "soft" input from these critical sources waste resources the international community cannot afford to squander. Organizations like the World Bank might perform internal cost-benefit analyses to discover how much they could gain from having anthropological input on every policy question.

If cultural insight reveals a specific "cost" which is prohibiting change, the development practitioner often can find ways to compensate for that potential loss, and thus promote the desired developmental change. The promotion of wood-conserving stoves or alternative fuels in places where deforestation is a concern is one example. The chore of collecting wood by women may represent a treasured opportunity to socialize away from home, an exchange they may be reluctant to forego. If the preparation of alternative fuel (e.g., charcoal, dung) is given an analogous social function, or if a concomitant development activity (for example, mothers' clubs for primary health care), provides an adequate substitute for socializing needs, then new fuel-efficient cooking methods may be accepted more readily. In this kind of situation, the development practitioner should improve understanding of the new technology and its benefits and reduce the conflict it poses with the local culture.[55] This type of action demands what Geertz calls "local knowledge."[56] Much development planning suffers from ignorance of local knowledge. In Indonesia, the government entrusted development planning to formally educated urbanites who had no knowledge of the rural ecosystem or informal economy. That policy meant "much of this planning is wrongheaded and unsuccessful. This will continue to be the case so long as traditional systems of knowledge and belief are regarded as obstacles to development . . . ."[57]

Confronting Inherent Conservatism

Another factor affecting the success of induced change stems from the vulnerability which development aims to reduce — the tendency to avoid uncertain change. Poor people are conservative by nature because their mar-

55. Arensberg and Niehoff, 41.
56. Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).
57. Dove, 8.

ginal existence leaves little room for risk-taking behavior.[58] What little they have is a known quantity, and is clung to tightly; anything that threatens it is resisted.[59] Risk-avoiding behavior is sometimes associated with a fatalistic attitude. It is important to recognize that this way of interpreting bad happenings is not just a primitive belief system inhibiting development. Fatalism must be understood as "situational apathy" which is a cultural phenomenon borne of chronic deprivation and repeated disappointment,[60] a psychological adaptation to trying circumstances.

This understanding suggests two essential development practices:

> 1) ensure the success of initial interventions; in the context of fatalism, a failed demonstration is powerful enough to permanently dissuade; and
>
> 2) allow the old ways to coexist as much as possible with the new, because tradition functions as security for marginalized people. Destroying the "known quantity" abruptly (even if the introduced change is judged "successful" by the outsider) will only increase anxiety, and may be so social-psychologically dysfunctional that it prevents sustainability. Development must, therefore, build upon rather than discard existing cultural variables. It means that the policy-making process must include serious, explicit adaptation.[61]

While the majority of examples used here pertain to small-scale interventions, cultural traditions can be transformed from obstacles to facilitators in development at the macro level as well. Look to the case of Japan. There, Western-style growth lauded by economists worldwide was built on cultural values unique to Japan. Characteristics of traditional feudal Japanese society — loyalty, frugality, responsibility, obligation — were harnessed in new ways and redirected to fuel industrialization and economic growth.[62] Japan's performance is envied today by Westerners who remain puzzled and annoyed at qualities that are interpreted as irrational and inflexible — yet those very characteristics sustain Japan's economic might.

In sum, culture does indeed influence development, but not necessarily in a negative way. Externally-induced development efforts will be more successful and sustainable if cultural variables are considered.

PART III: CULTURALLY ATTUNING POLICY

Information

Information is the key factor in culturally attuning development interventions, for both policy design and project implementation. Just as project

58. "Risk-taking" is distinguished from "experimentation." The latter is very common among subsistence-level producers, but experimentation is limited in scope so as not to pose real risk.
59. Arensberg and Niehoff, 131.
60. Ibid., 159.
61. Ibid., 131.
62. DeGregori and Pi-Sunyer, 24.

beneficiaries need to be informed about proposed changes so as to make sound choices, development practitioners must be open to information about the people with whom they work. The outsider's definitions of those people and their needs must be fluid and able to respond to new information. The goal of this kind of information can be thought of as equalizing supply and demand. For some reason, this cardinal rule of economics is disregarded by development planners. Projects are launched at the will of Western donors, regardless of local demand.

The acquisition and integration of cultural information on the policy level begins when development planners investigate existing data on the subject population. They should survey both ethnographies and case histories of previous development efforts. The latter seems particularly obvious. Why would any development agency or government proceed with interventions without attempting to integrate learnings from past experience? Whether out of negligence, arrogance, or design, this obvious, cost-effective step remains neglected. A great many of these lessons will involve cultural factors, and integrating that learning into new policy is a means of culturally attuning interventions.

The next logical step for policy-makers is to consult with anthropologists. Ideally, the anthropologist will be hired as a full-time team member from the outset of policy deliberations and will be a specialist on the targeted society. But even without these conditions, the tools and insights of an anthropologist serve an invaluable information-integrating function.

Actors: The Role of Anthropologists

Even the most rigorous economic research and quantitatively-based policy design for LDCs demands judgment calls. Research in Third World settings is notoriously fraught with difficulties. Data are often incomplete, inconsistent, and of questionable quality. Because a certain amount of "guesstimating" is a given in development, the input of a culture specialist becomes invaluable. An anthropologist is likely to have the type of information that will make speculation more realistic. Local knowledge can fill critical gaps in economic data.

Moreover, anthropology is not completely "soft." For decades, anthropologists followed Bronislaw Malinowski, the father of ethnographic field, who enjoined: "weigh, measure and count" data.[63] When anthropologists use statistical skills to quantify "soft" variables, they give practical meaning to variables unfamiliar to economists.

Hostility and disrespect have hindered economist-anthropologist relationships. Anthropologists, in particular, need to abandon excessive demands for "more research" and their exclusive jargon. The ability of anthropologists to translate critical cultural information into guidelines for sound policy is a resource that development must tap. But anthropologists must translate into

63. Mair, 5.

the language of practitioners in order to be heard. Perhaps anthropologists should study governments and international agencies as they would approach any other culture.

The Role of Development Practitioners

Even without trained anthropologists on a development team, the cultural perspective can be made explicit. Non-specialists can "tune-in" to previously neglected variables, gaining necessary cultural data. If government agencies and private voluntary organizations (PVOs) devote a portion of training time to "cultural sensitizing" and basic social science research methods, stressing contact and rapport with the people, their change agents can learn to ask the right questions and remain open to cultural information that will heighten their effectiveness.

A starting point for the cultural orientation of development practitioners is to promote understanding of their own cultural "baggage" and how it affects their interactions in Third World settings. One striking example is the North American tendency to strictly separate work and pleasure. In many societies the distinction is artificial and irrelevant. If the concept persists in the Westerner's mind, his expectations will curtail effective interaction with beneficiaries.

Dealings with government officials also must be viewed in a cultural light. Visits to discuss programming with officials at the Filipino Ministry of Health were often frustrating for this American, until it was understood that business and pleasure can not be separated for Filipino counterparts. Personal stories and community gossip were necessary preliminaries to, if not the primary substance of, ministry "business."[64]

The strict separation of church and state is deeply valued by most Americans. But attempts to transfer this concept frustrate development efforts in many LDCs. In Indonesia, for example, the government chose to attach religious associations to political parties to achieve development objectives,[65] while in many Arab countries Islam has been integrated within the state to fulfill religious dictums.

Another dimension to Western cultural baggage that poses a barrier is the assumption that the well-educated, well-paid Western expert is "all-knowing" rather than "all-resourceful."[66] The Westerner brings technical and financial power, and takes on the role of teacher, too often overlooking the need to learn. To assume ignorance of underdeveloped peoples is a grave mistake; to recognize the local knowledge but discount it as inapplicable for the type of "modernizing" intervention planned is nearly as self-defeating. Traditional systems of knowledge must not be destroyed or ignored. Instead, they must be apprehended and utilized as valuable resources for development.[67]

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64. This was the author's field observation, 1983-85.
65. Dove, 3-4.
66. Dove, 7.
67. Ibid., 7-8.

Once cognizant of his or her own cultural biases, the development practitioner can do the research necessary to culturally attune interventions. Participant observation is the recommended method, regardless of the formal training of field workers. It is the standard technique used by anthropologists in the field, but the basic principles can be easily taught and utilized effectively by any development professional.[68]

Implementation

The key to implementing culturally sound, sustainable development projects rests in the attitude of policy-makers and field workers. A summary of goals includes:

1) abandon ethnocentrism;

2) make cultural variables explicit items to consider from the outset of policy formulation;

3) be open to learning local knowledge; and

4) be flexible with plans and techniques.

The "adaptive policy approach" of Dennis Rondinelli[69] is a useful model. Rondinelli echoes the need for openness and learning among development professionals discussed above. Policy open to "social learnings" and appreciative of the complex nature of development[70] allows for the explicit incorporation of cultural variables. Culturally attuning interventions is a fluid, creative process, and the attitude of policy-makers, as advocated by Rondinelli, should reflect that quality.

An excellent set of guidelines for cultural adaptation to project implementation in the field is presented by Arensberg and Niehoff.[71] Their 1971 work extensively covers a wide variety of issues affecting the outcome of development interventions. Simple research methods, communication issues, educational techniques, interpersonal relations, change motivation, community participation, political, social, and economic factors — all are accounted for in their "handbook" for social change. Lawrence Salmen's recent publication[72] offers similar guidelines to culturally attuning intervention. While still largely unheeded, the wisdom of such approaches has borne fruit in some development efforts.

68. The World Bank, in response to perceived inadequacies of common methods, commissioned participant observation evaluations of two projects. Lawrence Salman, the researcher, describes his findings and higlights the benefits of understanding "the people's point of view." Salmen, 3-8.

69. Dennis Rondinelli, *Development Projects as Policy Experiments: an Adaptive Approach to Development Administration* (New York: Methuen, 1983).

70. Ibid., 1-2.

71. *Introducing Social Change: A Manual for Community Development*, 2d ed., Chicago: Aldine, 1971).

72. Lawrence F. Salmen, *Listen to the People: Participant-Observer Evaluation of Development Projects* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

In the realm of health education, development practitioners have discovered that the use of local media can be very effective. The comic book is recognized as a popular means of entertainment for the impoverished literate all over the Third World. Rather than restrict messages about hygiene, inoculations, and nutrition to official-looking posters, or unpopular seminars, health information has been incorporated into comic book stories that appeal to both young and old of varied social classes. In the Philippines, the use of "Komiks" have become particularly widespread and successful.

Another medium, radio, was recognized by an anthropologist in Swaziland as an untapped resource for a health education project. After learning that 83 percent of Swazi homes had radios, the anthropologist designed entertaining health programs to educate and motivate change. These programs featured real-life dramas with believable dialogue, realistic sound effects, local vernacular, and humor and music characteristic of the targeted rural areas. These programs contrasted with unpopular government-sponsored radio programs which appeared staid, urban, and condescending.

Another important component of these programs was the successful accommodation of traditional health beliefs in pursuit of public health objectives. The presentation of information was given in a manner consistent with local concepts, and was consequently more credible and understandable.[73]

The performing arts were recognized as an avenue for nutrition education in a project initiated by the author in the rural Philippines. Village health workers could recite by rote the names of food groups and vitamins; this nutritional "knowledge" given by the Ministry of Health lacked meaning and application in their lives, however. As an alternative to dull ministry of health seminars, the author engaged the local enthusiasm for stage performance. The indigenous health workers planned a series of nutrition programs in which they acted out humorous and informative skits and put lessons to music. The greatest value of this approach resulted from the internalization of nutritional knowledge on the part of health workers who had never had an opportunity to think creatively about the meaning of the information. The traveling troupe of indigenous health educators drew large and enthusiastic audiences, and subsequent evaluation found that information presented in a familiar form of entertainment was not only more readily, but meaningfully received.

In the arena of population control, program failure in the Third World is often rooted in cultural insensitivity. Family planning has only delayed, abstract benefits, and for most poor, rural people, it entails immediate costs that prohibit acceptance. In many countries, the Ministry of Health promotes family planning and distributes birth control devices through their rural health clinics. This defines the problem as a health issue. Certainly the maleffects to the health of both mother and children from inadequate birth spacing are clear to us. It is necessary to ask, however, are those effects clear to the target population? If they can be made clear, do they operate as disincentives for frequent pregnancies?

73. Green, 23.

Family planning programs administered by Western development agencies typically center on women. This approach reflects the Western definition of pregnancy as a women's issue rather than a family issue. Once again, we must ask if this is an appropriate assumption given the cultural context of family planning efforts.

Assigned to assist the Filipino Ministry of Health with its family planning efforts, the author noted several things about Filipino culture which would affect her interventions. First, in a traditional society where premarital sex is not socially sanctioned, and the modesty of young women is expected, it was inappropriate for an unmarried, young American woman to lead a crusade for birth control. Efforts would be undertaken in cooperation with the local midwife, the ministry's official representative, who held the social legitimacy to discuss the sensitive issues of reproduction.

The second thing evident to the American practitioner, and most important for this example, was that in the characteristically "machismo" culture of the Philippines, men dominated family decision-making. It was learned that many women who had been targeted by previous family planning promotion were indeed interested in limiting their family size, but without the support of their husbands, they were unable to make changes. Acceptance of birth control was hindered, then, because the women-centered approach neglected to address the mens' decision-making power and the social issues which would discourage husbands from approving of birth control.

As a result of these simple insights, family planning educational programs were designed "for men only." The first task was to assemble the men. Since women usually attended health-related seminars, non-traditional promotional methods were needed. The dates and times were chosen in accordance with mens' schedules, personal invitations were extended, and refreshments were advertised. (The local coconut wine and snack foods were hallmarks of any social gathering, and were considered important for creating a comfortable atmosphere.) It also was important to announce that no women were to be present at the seminar. The restriction to "men only" was necessary to facilitate a relaxed question-and-answer session. Thus, the setting of the initial seminar was "culturally attuned."

The presentation of the issues had to clarify mens' misconceptions about birth control methods, while maintaining sensitivity to their anxieties. The man who conducted the seminars was the intelligent, dynamic, and respected head of the provincial population commission. He had both the official status necessary for respect, as well as "insider" status, and an easy style that created rapport.

The issues the men themselves felt to be important were discussed. Since many aspired to educate their children, the economic incentives for limiting family size were meaningful. If men were more concerned about having a secure base of farm labor through children, then the health and nutritional benefits of greater spacing of fewer children were persuasive. If they feared physical maleffects from birth control techniques, the medical aspects were clarified.

One last element of the culturally attuned family planning approach was to utilize personal testimony from community members who had decided to practice family planning. As a result of participant observation in the community, the American practitioner happened to learn about one man's vasectomy. This person was a very well-liked and respected member of the community, who had three healthy children and one of the nicest homes in the village. His testimony in front of sixty peers was powerfully instructive and persuasive. A pre-planned, standard ministry or NGO program most likely would have not incorporated this invaluable component.

This example serves to illustrate how cost-effective it can be to adapt interventions to local culture. There were valuable resources unique to that social setting just waiting to be tapped, and an important "missing link" regarding the society's conception of gender roles waiting to be recognized. The success of this culturally attuned intervention could have been measured systematically and quantifiably with standard social science methods. In this case, only informal, subjective evaluation was possible, but from virtually every group involved, the town officials, the village men and women, and the organizers, it was a clear success.

CONCLUSION

The history of development is a sad one. There are some shining examples of success, to be sure. But among development practitioners and observers, frustration grows. Failure persists because Western change agents search in the wrong places for answers. Clouded by the promise of high technology and higher education, experts in Washington neglect two primary sources for sound planning: experience and beneficiaries.

The potential to improve through critical examination of both successes and failures is underestimated. Scrutiny reveals that culture explains much development experience. When local people participate in every step of the development process, when local knowledge is tapped, and when local traditions are accounted for, development tends to happen. Conversely, when indigenous people and their culture are ignored, interventions cannot produce sustainable development and may enhance un-development.

The project beneficiaries themselves should be the primary sources of information required to assess needs, design projects and manage implementation. Culture sensitivity is an extremely cost-effective resource that is underutilized by development professionals. Furthermore, the cultural traditions themselves, which many view as obstacles to development, present yet another untapped resource for development. Culture is the missing link in development. It not only must be recognized, but mobilized to produce truly sustainable development. By revising attitudes and including culture specialists on planning teams, development policy-makers can culturally attune their interventions and stem the tide of failure.