

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last 5 decades the development activities of rural and urban people, local leaders, NGOs, government agencies, as well as international research and support agencies, have led to a situation in which more people have food, better health, longer lives, more access to education and faster communication. And yet, more people than ever before live under circumstances of extreme poverty. Education, healthcare, markets, and employment systems often function poorly. At global level, the environmental problems are alarming, the differences in wealth between countries are enormous, social and cultural systems are disintegrating, while political and ethnic tensions are increasing [Beemans in Harper, 2000].

In addressing these problems, a great number of initiatives and approaches aim at an economically feasible, socially just, ecologically sound, and culturally acceptable development path. Often these initiatives are carried out by networks working on a particular theme such as poverty reduction, participatory development, natural resources, low external input and sustainable agriculture, energy, biodiversity, indigenous rights, cultural diversity, or language. These initiatives give considerable attention to traditional knowledge, although the focus is often limited to the technical part of it, while the socio-cultural and spiritual aspects of these knowledge systems often receive little attention.

Compas. The Compas programme has its roots in innovative initiatives with low external input agriculture, based on local knowledge and practices. Since 1997 Compas functions as an international network that supports initiatives for endogenous development, or 'development from within'. The partners in this network are NGOs and universities based in Latin America, Africa, Asia and Europe. They link theoretical reflections about development with practical interventions in the rural areas, thus contributing to the emergence of insights and effective methodologies. The approach of the Compas programme can be described as 'action-research on endogenous development'. It aims at supporting the growing movement towards sustainable and endogenous development. Through the Compas Magazine and regular workshops, Compas also contributes to the international intercultural dialogue on development.

Endogenous development is based on the local initiatives to use resources. Key aspects of supporting endogenous development are: building on local needs, improving local knowledge and practices, local control of development options, identification of new development niches, selective use of external resources, retention of benefits in the local area, exchange and learning between cultures, training and capacity building, networking and strategic partnership, understanding systems of knowing and learning. This book presents the experiences and insights gained with endogenous development during the Compas programme: between 1997 and 2002.

Ancient Roots and New Shoots. In the course of mankind's history, several cultures, each with their own religion, worldview, scientific concepts and technologies, have emerged. The introduction of agriculture eventually resulted in the building of towns, the

emergence of trade, as well as writing and accounting, the development of specialised professions, scientific discoveries, and schools. Several early civilisations reached high degrees of sophistication and influence, especially in the Middle East, Mediterranean, South Asia and China. Later, the Greek-Roman, Mayan, Inca, Arab and western cultures gained influence. The rise and fall of civilisations, with their domination, control and exchanges of cultures and technologies, seems to be a phenomenon of all times throughout the world.

The last couple of centuries have witnessed the incomparable dominance of the western culture. Western economic mechanisms, values, science and technology increasingly replace traditional cultures and knowledge systems throughout the world. These traditional systems are rejected, or regarded poorly, while little is done to strengthen their dynamics for local development. The capacity of local knowledge systems is further weakened when the younger generation is attracted by the dominant culture, and decides to move away from their cultural background.

At the same time, the traditional cultures display remarkable resilience. Though not always openly expressed, traditional values, knowledge, concepts and practices still play an important role in the decision making process of rural people in many parts of the world. Traditional leaders are influential, and their cultural values - often quite different from those which dominate in the West - prevail in many rural societies. This of course, includes both the positive and more negative aspects of traditional practices. Meanwhile, the limitations of the western culture and technologies are also becoming clearer. The persistent problems of industrialised agriculture, such as environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity, lack of animal welfare, and the disintegration of rural communities, strengthen the call for innovative rural development approaches.

Diversity and co-evolution as important keys. There is growing awareness that technologies developed under one set of conditions may not be effective under other economic, ecological and socio-cultural situations. Instead of applying fixed technology packages under all conditions, more importance is now attached to the concept of 'diversity': diversity in values, scientific concepts, technologies, development approaches, farming styles, biological systems, cultural expressions and lifestyles. Diversity is increasingly considered to hold important keys towards solving major global problems.

The ultimate result of basing development actions on this concept can be a diversity of sciences, practices and cultures, which co-exist and co-evolve. This diversity allows for a variation of options and solutions according to the specifics of local situations. Combining the efforts of innovative rural people, development organisations and policy-making bodies is required to bring this concept one step further, and to relate it to our increasingly globalising world.

This book

The book provides insights into some of the cultures and knowledge systems on the different continents. The authors from Asia, Africa, Latin America and Europe have learned that traditional cultures and knowledges - we deliberately use this word in plural - of the

local people can be the starting point for local development activities. In doing so, two risks need to be avoided: the risk of romanticising local traditions and the risk of rejecting them. This, of course, is also true for modern technologies, which can be romanticised or rejected. Taking knowledge systems seriously implies a constructive and critical position, one that searches for possibilities to improve upon them. Strengthening the capacity for learning, experimenting and changing is an important task for all those involved in the process of enhancing endogenous development. Experiences presented here provide important insights in endogenous development

Acknowledging the importance of equitable and just international relations, this book does not emphasise confrontation between the knowledge systems of the West and the rest. Instead, it presents a critical analysis of the mechanisms required for endogenous development, which includes both traditional and modern knowledge and practices.

Content. The first three chapters of this book provide a historical perspective of cultures and knowledges in the world, a description of the endogenous development approach, and the background of the Compas programme. The chapters on the geographical regions (4, 5, 6 and 7) describe the most important aspects of the cultures, knowledge and technologies prevailing in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Europe, with specific reference to those areas where Compas partners are building up experiences. This includes the worldview of the peoples, their knowledge and concepts, as well as the demographic and political context. Special attention is given to the history of each region.

These Ancient Roots continue to influence the present situation, and give rise to New Shoots in endogenous development. The case studies in the same chapters present practical experiences of rural people and development staff in enhancing endogenous development. The insights gained into traditional practices and values are described together with the local constraints related to human welfare, ecology or economy, and the results of the wide variety of interventions to improve upon them. Though the major focus is on agriculture, health and natural resources, the activities also include a variety of other aspects, such as tourism, crafts and marketing.

An analysis of these efforts, as well as the mechanisms for creating an enabling environment for endogenous development is presented in the concluding chapters (8 and 9). The annexes provide information on the Compas partner organisations, and present an explanation of some of the most important concepts used in this book.

Limitations. This book presents a snapshot of the learning process in the 14 countries in Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and Europe, where Compas partner organisations are implementing their activities. At present, Compas is working only in countries where English or Spanish is spoken. Information about other cultures, such as the Arab world, the Chinese, the Aborigines, the North American natives, to name but a few, are absent in this volume.

In the process of writing this book, we have not been able to overcome all our cultural biases, as the editors and most of the authors have been trained in the western way of thinking. The very process of describing the historic context in the various regions confronted us with striking cultural differences, for example, in the concepts of time. Such

cultural differences also exist in the scientific approaches. A scientist in the West is supposed to accumulate knowledge by using the five senses - smell, taste, hearing, touch and sight - while in other scientific traditions, the senses may be complemented with consciousness, religious experiences and intuition.

Readability has been the argument for reducing the number of local terms, or for translating them into English, and in the process the original significance may have been somewhat distorted. Moreover, although the editors have tried to prevent generalisation, writing about cultures may have in places done just that. Despite these limitations we feel that the experiences and insights presented here provide valuable insights on endogenous development. The authors are aware that much still needs to be learned in this field, and are open for comments and reactions. The Compas programme produces the six-monthly Compas Magazine as a medium for the dialogue on endogenous development.

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