

Endogenous Development and Bio-cultural Diversity

The interplay of worldviews,
globalization and locality

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globalization and locality

Bertus Haverkort and Stephan Rist (eds)

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Introduction

This book contains the papers that were presented at the International Conference on 'Endogenous Development and Bio-Cultural Diversity - The interplay of worldviews, globalization and locality', held in Geneva (Switzerland) from 3-5 October 2006. The papers present the work of internationally recognised activists, experts, researchers and policy makers in the emerging field of 'endogenous development and bio-cultural diversity'.

Endogenous development is here understood as the sum of views, values and practices which marginalised, silenced or oppressed societal actors create from within, in response to the initiatives of development coming from outside or being implemented top-down. Putting these ideas in the context of bio-cultural diversity showed to highly promising for establishing inclusive, mutually respectful and productive dialogues between all forms of knowledge which are involved in shaping the discourses and practices related to development. The resulting debates and discussions are summarised in the book along three sections.

The *first section* presents papers that focus on the *conceptual foundations of 'endogenous development and bio-cultural diversity'*. They reflect the wealth of inspiration and the philosophical, ontological and epistemological foundations of the debates that were emerging through the presented papers. They show that endogenous development and bio-cultural diversity are not aiming to compete – in the sense of being superior or better – with other more conventional and mainstream notions of development. Although from a conventional perspective, this might be perceived as a weakness, the papers show that this situation is a consequence and reflection of understanding endogenous development as time-space and thus context-specific expressions of bio-cultural diversity. Endogenous development thus recognises and appreciates the diversity of ecological social, cultural and economic systems around the world. It considers the diversity of ontologies and epistemologies underlying the manifold cultures in which development is debated as an important resource that enables mutual learning and the co-evolution of different forms of knowledge and the corresponding notions of development.

Instead of searching for the advancement of so-called 'universal science', endogenous development aims to enable the co-evolving of different ways of knowing and to create bridges between the different ontological and epistemological positions and traditions through a culture of dialogue between, learning from, and listening to one another. The papers in this first section thus offer intellectual and inspirational building blocks that help to bridge the gaps between different ways of knowing and different conceptions of development.

The papers show the importance of relating the notion of 'endogenous development' with that of 'bio-cultural diversity', as a way of overcoming the narrow, sectorialised and fragmented basis of dominant current thinking on 'development'. The authors point out that the philosophical basis of conventional science can no longer be considered as the sole, or the most important, source of knowledge and development. The understanding of, and relationships between, mind, matter, life,

human beings, society and institutions as they exist in different cultures emerge as a main focus of efforts to further explore and constitute the conceptual foundations of endogenous development.

As the papers are rooted in concrete contexts and practices, they not only illustrate shortcomings of conventional academic approaches dealing with the diversity that is inherent in culture and biology. They also spell out concrete ways in which biological, cultural and scientific-cognitive diversity can be productively brought together in the context of mutual learning processes

Precisely because of this aspect, the *second section* presents papers that reflect on concrete experience of endogenous development as practiced in the contexts of Africa, the Americas, Asia, and Europe. The contributions elaborate on the experience of development initiatives and accompanying action-research projects in a context where it is accepted that mainstream science is just one – and in many cases not even the most important – form of knowledge.

What the papers presented in this section have in common is that they show how endogenous development and bio-cultural diversity are mainly based on the prevalence of endogenous values shaped through the interplay of the social, spiritual and material spheres of life. Recognition of the specifics and diversity of endogenous values, which generally explicitly include spiritual dimensions, lies at the heart of endogenous development. While the papers in the first section emphasise the potentials and limitations of concepts of development deeply rooted in Western cultures, the papers in this second section show that endogenous development in practice has an eminently emerging character which, instead of being reducible to the implementation of conceptually defined ideas, has to be understood as the constantly and collectively re-worked interplay between the perceived nature-environment-resource continuum and corresponding values, and notions of spirituality that shape social institutions, relations and hierarchies.

As some papers acknowledge explicitly, it becomes clear that there is no generic or 'objective' basis for relating different forms of knowledge, e.g. relating academic with local or indigenous knowledge or knowledge from other non-western cultural origins. Each case in which different forms of knowledge are interrelated is also a confrontation between different sets of values. This means that ethical issues become central elements of concern when bridging the gap between different forms of knowledge. Although the examples are cases from very heterogeneous contexts and situations, they all show that respect, solidarity, complementarity and reciprocity are basic values that enable the creation of synergies and complementarity between different forms of knowledge. The widely practiced pursuit of a hegemonic body of (universal) knowledge through competition between different forms of knowledge, does not apply to the case of endogenous development. The practice of endogenous development shows that such a hegemony of mainstream knowledge can be a disturbing factor, as it hinders joint definition of the values and concepts of the kind needed to enable cooperation and synergies between different forms of knowledge.

The papers show the importance of mutual learning. They make it clear that endogenous development goes beyond the conventional separation between analysis (research), planning (policy), and action (implementation). Instead of conceiving these activities as a linear sequence from research to implementation, endogenous development sees them as the outcome of iterative mutual learning processes

involving all actors concerned and building on a combination of material, social and spiritual lessons; all actors are constantly involved in setting and revising goals, strategies and outcomes of actions aim at concretizing the principles of endogenous development in concrete socio-cultural and environmental contexts. The examples refer to domains such as agriculture, health, education, microfinance, forestry, wildlife and nature conservation, and in each case the strong and weak points of traditional values, concepts and social dynamics are taken as starting point for development activities where local people and external actors learn together. From this perspective the one-sidedness of mere problem-orientation can be overcome, since apart from problems, existing potentials are also taken into account.

The third section of the book draws our attention to the importance of the *policy context* that either enables or hinders endogenous development. The papers reveal that endogenous development faces a rather difficult situation. On the one hand there is a growing number of people who recognise the limitations, failures, contradictions and aggressiveness of the modern, neo-liberal and globalized models of development. On the other hand the comparatively few 'winners' who benefit from this type of modernisation are becoming increasingly powerful and disrespectful towards the growing mass of 'losers' of the very same processes.

This creates a situation where many conflicts emerge both within and between local, regional and national communities, including government and non-government agencies, transnational corporations and civil society organisations. This situation is further aggravated by the fact that the conditions and possibilities for addressing these conflicts in the public sphere are rapidly eroding: Due to the fact that a majority of the people on the planet have limited access to income, food, education, health, land, water, decent work and a healthy environment, they are excluded from participation in the public space, which stops them from contributing to development through their experience and knowledge of traditional or new ways of resolving, transforming or preventing the emerging conflicts.

The papers also illustrate the fact that in many situations the national policies for land use, land ownership, marketing, health care, food systems, education and knowledge development are based on conventional standalone notions of development and thus discriminate against endogenous development. Examples show that such policies can be changed by demonstrating the potential and power of customary laws, traditional health practices and farming, and systems of governance to achieve more sustainable development.

Against this background, it becomes clear that endogenous development can transcend the local level by creating alliances among groups of people who engage in a variety of social movements around the world. This enables these actors to aim at policy dialogues within their own societies in such a way that they can create conditions under which all depend on the 'power of the better argument', instead of depending on those who have greatest economic, political and military power.

A comparison of the arguments of these more policy-oriented papers with the insights presented in the former two sections shows that working for endogenous development implies the need for simultaneously developing ontological and conceptual foundations, stimulating and assessing existing practices of endogenous development, and engaging in policy dialogues to create a conducive environment.

The authors of papers in this book draw attention to the fundamental importance of achieving a balance between different and sometimes contradictory elements: instead of perceiving the differences between spiritual, social and material growth as insurmountable contradictions, they can be considered as domains to be brought into a productive balance. Such bringing into balance of the multiple poles of life constitutes a major challenge, especially if it is intended to bear fruit beyond the level of individual persons' experience of life.

The book shows that endogenous development needs to be nurtured by a broad alliance of people who are engaged in personal growth, do innovative action-research, take concrete initiatives and strategise to change the dominant economic and political power structures. In order to do this properly, many of the authors suggest developing nurturing, so-called female capacities or 'matri-forces', available for all human beings, be they men or women.

Apart from sharing inspiring discussions, reflections and feelings, the conference participants expressed their commitment to enhancing endogenous development and bio-cultural diversity. A Statement of Commitment was formulated during the Conference and is presented below.

Stephan Rist and Bertus Haverkort, July 2007