

**Indigenous Organizations and Development, edited by Peter Blunt and D. Michael Warren. Intermediate Technology Publications, London (1996), xxii, 253 pp. (IT Studies in Indigenous Knowledge and Development.)**

**Population, Economic Development, and the Environment: The Making of Our Common Future, edited by Kerstin Lindahl-Kiessling and Hans Landberg. Oxford University Press, Oxford (1994), xxii, 282 pp.**

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Increasing integration of local and traditional economies into an international capitalist system--and the resulting social and ecological problems--is paralleled by increasing efforts to understand and explain these phenomena, predict future developments, and control them. Explanatory models often amount to one-factor hypotheses: taking out a slice of reality, arguing a particular and limited point of view, or representing specific and limited aspects of the human reality, they often pronounce judgment on issues beyond the scope and confines of their argument. Although the insights provided by such efforts more often than not are interesting and illuminating, one is often left with a feeling of "So what?" or "What is the practical significance of this?" or "How to bridge this with existing conflicting paradigms?" or even "Can this be operationalized?"

The two volumes reviewed here represent two recent examples. Major attention will be given to the *Indigenous Organizations and Development* volume edited by Blunt and Warren, while Lindahl-Kiessling and Landberg's *Population, Economic Development, and the Environment* will be used for supporting arguments to place the former in a more encompassing context, and to suggest further avenues along which the arguments in the Blunt and Warren volume can be developed.

Blunt and Warren's volume contains a wealth of local-level practical information and knowledge, too much to do justice to in this review. The work on which the volume is based began two or three decades earlier, when the authors first got involved in rural development, governance, public sector management and training, primarily working in Africa. The 1980s saw the beginning of a paradigm shift, with increased emphasis on participatory approaches, capacity building, and local institutions, as well as with the long-term viability of development investments. According to the authors, "this generated interest in the nature of indigenous or local-level, community-based knowledge and how it provided the basis for both individual and community-level decision-making" (p. xiii). As this knowledge accumulated, it became clear to the authors that a major area of concern in the new development paradigm had been overlooked. They argue that indigenous knowledge systems constitute "an important bridge to mutual understanding and

communication . . . between the local communities and the development practitioners” (p. xiii). The volume has benefited from the insights of a number of researchers and practitioners, notably Norman Uphoff who, incidentally, also wrote the Preface.

The various case studies focus on local planning and management systems, local levels of technology and development, and community-based systems of evaluation and capacity building. The volume is organized by geography into three parts: Africa, the Indian sub-continent, and Asia-Pacific, with the major emphasis on Africa.

The volume describes a variety of indigenous organizations, and the authors believe that this is the first effort in this direction in the development literature. They see it as a complement to a recently published volume that focuses on the cultural dimensions of development (D.M. Warren, L.J. Slikkerveer, and D. Brokensha 1995). Based on the premise that local people should decide what is best for them, Blunt and Warren argue that indigenous organizations present a natural point of departure and focus in development assistance. Although this may be a correct assertion, a pertinent question is how to do it.

The International Symposium on Indigenous Knowledge and Sustainable Development (Silang, Philippines, 20-26 September, 1992) agreed on the following working definition of indigenous knowledge, proposed by D. Michael Warren:

The term ‘indigenous knowledge’ (IK) is used synonymously with ‘traditional’ and ‘local knowledge’ to differentiate the knowledge developed by a given community from the international knowledge system, sometimes also called ‘Western’ system, generated through universities, government research centres and private industry. IK refers to the knowledge of indigenous peoples as well as any other defined community (Indigenous Knowledge & Development Monitor, 1(2) [1993]).

Furthermore, indigenous knowledge systems relate to the way members of a given community define and classify phenomena in the physical/natural, social, and ideational environments. Examples include local classifications of soils, knowledge of which local crop varieties grow in difficult environments, and traditional ways of treating human and animal diseases. Indigenous knowledge systems provide the basis for local-level decision making, this frequently occurs through formal and informal community associations and organizations. Communities identify problems and seek solutions to them in such local forums, capitalizing and leading to experimentation and innovations. Successful new technologies are added to the indigenous knowledge system. Indigenous forms of communication are vital to the preservation, development, and spread of indigenous knowledge.

The definition of indigenous knowledge given above stands in contrast to the way the term is used in the present volume. Here indigenous knowledge is not defined, but it appears to be closely linked to the term “indigenous organization.” The latter term is understood to comprise:

those local-level institutions with an organizational base that are endogenous as opposed to exogenous within the community. Exogenous organizations are those that were established through forces external to the community (p. xiv).

As such, there appears to be an effort to link the overall argument with key elements and views in the emerging global indigenous peoples movement. Elsewhere, an institution is understood to be a complex of norms and behavior that persist over time through serving a purpose, whereas an organization is a structure of recognized and accepted roles.

Although there is some overlap between institutions and organizations understood in this way, only institutions that have an organizational basis are considered. Furthermore, indigenous organizations are understood to be a subset of the larger category of local organizations, something that appears to be very limiting and possibly even flawed.

Although I understand the rationale for the term indigenous knowledge, there are clear disadvantages to its use within specific political contexts. The term “indigenous” is not likely to score very highly with national-level stakeholders, particularly in Asia (Africa is a different case, which may explain why Blunt and Warren prefer this term). Because the proof of the validity and usefulness of the indigenous knowledge paradigm lies in its successful application within often highly contentious political realities, it would in many cases be better to use the terms “local knowledge” or “traditional knowledge.”

In terms of the applications of indigenous knowledge, it originally grew out of the perceived needs and problems of the African agricultural sector. The international indigenous knowledge agenda has grown substantially, both in terms of coverage and content, and is now firmly lodged in various research institutions and journals. Dr. D. Michael Warren, an anthropologist by training, was a key person in defining and promoting this agenda. He--among other things--founded the Center for Indigenous Knowledge for Agriculture and Rural Development (CIKARD) at Iowa State University. CIKARD (URL: [http://www.public.iastate.edu/~anthr\\_info/cikard/cikard.html](http://www.public.iastate.edu/~anthr_info/cikard/cikard.html)) was established to provide mechanisms to strengthen the capacity of development agencies to improve agricultural production and the quality of life in rural areas in cost-effective ways. Its goal is to collect indigenous knowledge and make it available to local communities, development professionals, and scientists. CIKARD concentrates on indigenous knowledge systems, decision-making systems, organizational structures and innovations. CIKARD recognized that the establishment of regional and national indigenous knowledge resource centers is the most effective way of systematically recording, documenting and using this knowledge. There are now more than 30 such global, regional and national centers, with an additional 20 centers in the process of being formalized. At the time of his unexpected death in Nigeria on 28 December, 1997, Dr. Warren was the Director of CIKARD and a member of the editorial board of the *Indigenous Knowledge and Development Monitor* (URL: <http://www.nuffic.nl/ciran/ikdm/index.html>). The present volume will stand as a lasting testimony to his crucial role in the growth of the international indigenous knowledge network.

*Population, Economic Development, and the Environment*, edited by Lindahl-Kiessling and Landberg, addresses somewhat similar issues, but it does so indirectly, and from a very different perspective. The primary position taken by Lindahl-Kiessling and Landberg is that the issue of population and its growth or decline cannot be separated from the whole set of questions of economic and social development, and from the environmental concerns related to the issues of production and consumption throughout the world. Analysis must be made at the global as well as at regional levels. More specifically, the Malthusian conflict constitutes the major argument running through the volume, with economic and social development and environmental issues as secondary and explanatory areas of concern. In addition to providing a fresh look at the work of Malthus, the volume addresses two main themes: factors underlying fertility changes, and development issues related to the population-environment nexus. Importantly, in connection with the latter issue, the volume argues that classical economics' reliance on the market as the key to solving all societal ills is flawed, and it concludes that the market mechanism cannot be permitted to operate alone. Certain patterns of environmental

deterioration are caused not by market failures but by government policies, and it follows that the causes of these failures increasingly should be sought, and addressed, in the context of institutional analyses.

The contributors to the Lindahl-Kiessling and Landberg volume are concerned about the several negative trends we today witness on a global level. They argue that the rapidly increasing stress on the world's natural resource base can, especially in the overpopulated areas of the world, create social tensions and conflicts between as well as within nations, and furthermore that such conflicts likely will occur before there is an ecological breakdown. Towards understanding this, they examine a wide array of issues, ranging from the connections between population size and growth, environmental degradation, and poverty. They take into account the increasing competition for natural resources by social structures on several levels, including on the household level.

Compared with the Blunt and Warren volume, the overall argument is much broader, and more complex. It is, perhaps, less intuitive, but it reflects a situation that is more difficult to model and where outcomes are equally difficult to predict, and it is thus more true to reality. While operating mainly on a macro-level, variables and issues on lower levels--all the way down to the household--are considered important.

The articles in *Population, Economic Development, and the Environment* are realistic in pointing out the possible futures, for all of us, if changes are not made, and some readers will accordingly see it as partly pessimistic in outlook. (In contrast, pieces in the *Indigenous Organizations and Development* volume do not address future scenarios, and the book as a whole comes across as overly optimistic in crediting the human race with the capacity to learn, adapt, and change for the benefit of the common good.)

The Lindahl-Kiessling and Landberg volume is one of several recent treatises that address similar issues on a global level. In this sense *Population, Economic Development and the Environment* does not contribute a great deal of new data and analyses. Its major contribution lies in an effort to place a number of disparate elements into a coherent analytical and explanatory framework. In aiming at tracing out a theoretical model for the interrelation between population, environment, and development, there is, however, little emphasis on giving concrete advice on local-level, regional, and national level action and practice.

Both volumes read well and present convincing stories, scenarios and arguments. This is to a large extent because they each have a clear mission that drives the arguments and compels the reader to follow. For the rest they are largely different, as witnessed by the following set of dichotomies, several of which are closely related:

*Population, Economic Development, and the Environment* is grounded in development and environmental economics, whereas *Indigenous Organizations and Development* is situated, to a large extent, in the social sciences;

*Population, Economic Development, and the Environment*, seeing social systems from the outside, talks about their "resilience," whereas *Indigenous Organizations and Development* talks about the sustainability of communities, seeing them from the inside, and subsequently presents this emic view to the outside;

*Population, Economic Development, and the Environment* focuses primarily on theory and analysis, whereas *Indigenous Organizations and Development* gives prior emphasis to action and practice; and,

*Population, Economic Development, and the Environment* is directed at the international policy and scientific levels, and aims at creating and supporting an international agenda, whereas *Indigenous Organizations and Development* focuses on grassroots practitioners, civil society, and the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO)-community, and aims at creating a grassroots agenda around these issues. In doing so, it largely presents a moral argument whereas the population volume presents a pragmatic and rational argument.

Having pointed out the differences in point of departure, focus, and aims, this juxtaposition of intellectual and scientific pursuits complements one another in many respects. *Indigenous Organizations and Development* is important because it supports and underlines other work currently going on in the development community, ranging from local NGOs to global financial institutions. Social sustainability is as important as environmental sustainability. Participation, consultation, transparency, stakeholder identification, cultural aspects of development, involving project affected people as well as the public sector, the private sector and the civil society, and institutional capacity building at the local level; these are all crucial issues that only recently have begun to be addressed in a comprehensive and structured manner, and they are enriched and complemented by the indigenous knowledge agenda.

*Population, Economic Development, and the Environment* is important because it presents the other side of the coin, as it were, namely the macro level. In doing so, it presents the overall political-economic framework within which the indigenous knowledge agenda must make its case. Although this framework certainly is both limiting and constraining, it is also facilitating, while at the same time providing opportunities.

According to advocates of indigenous knowledge, it is important for several reasons: (i) it represents the successful ways in which people have dealt with their environments; (ii) familiarity with local cultures can help extension workers and researchers communicate better with local people; and, (iii) it can help find the best solution to a development problem. Some comments on these pronouncement are in order: (i) indigenous knowledge clearly points toward successful adaptations, otherwise these cultural traits would disappear, but the implication that all indigenous knowledge therefore is useful at the present time is not necessarily correct; (ii) this is clearly true in the best of worlds and in a very limited and narrow context, but this usually does not at all mean that the solution to a problem is institutionalized and "solved," as external factors often will determine the long-term viability of the solution; and, (iii) indigenous knowledge may contribute to finding the best solution to a development problem, but a solution to a problem according to this is only theoretically interesting.

It is precisely here that the indigenous knowledge agenda interfaces with the macro level population argument, as portrayed in the Lindahl-Kiessling and Landberg volume. And it is to this interaction that the argument now will turn.

If everybody understands each other, all problems will disappear and the rational use of indigenous knowledge will proceed according to the plan. This is clearly naïve. This is not to say that the indigenous knowledge agenda has not had success. It certainly has. The point here is that this success to a large extent is defined in relation to the limited scope of the agenda, namely giving primary attention to technologies and techniques, and constructing an argument within an instrumental, objective agenda. Likewise, the success stories are small scale, and it is in the institutionalization and scaling up of such interesting experiences that the indigenous knowledge agenda up comes short.

In the spirit of democracy, openness, and transparency, the best thing we can do is to define an open playing field and invite any persons or category of persons to get involved. At the same time we clearly face a problem in that all stakeholders are not equal in terms of access to resources, including information and funding. Stakeholders will accordingly enter the contested playing field on unequal terms. In this situation an institution like the World Bank can do a couple of things. On the macro level it can work with governments on reforming regulatory and legal frameworks to create equal conditions and opportunities for all stakeholders. On the micro level, the World Bank can support local-level initiatives that aim at, for example, awareness raising, capacity building and support of local initiatives. While opting for an open-ended approach that excludes none, focused efforts are made to aid marginal groups in entering the playing field on more equal terms. The latter is achieved partly through direct support, partly through arguing on the macro level that it pays to include marginal groups, and partly through long-term arguments of environmental and economic sustainability.

It is not easy to pinpoint what is missing in the indigenous knowledge approach, and it is with a certain uneasiness that one criticizes something as worthwhile and inherently good as this. However that may be, I think it boils down to an approach that implicitly, if not explicitly, sees the local community, with its constituent institutions, organizations, and knowledge systems as both the beginning and end of analysis and focus. Limited in its ability to characterize local-global articulations, this approach is limited accordingly in its ability to evaluate successes and failures. Most importantly, there appears to be no emerging framework dealing with political and strategic alliances with other parties, either on the same level as the community or at higher levels of integration. Outside actors, issues, and levels certainly exist and are acknowledged, but are never really brought into the analysis. Each case of indigenous knowledge is somehow seen as unique, and there appears to be little emphasis on doing comparisons across sectors and cultures. The history and rationale of the overall indigenous knowledge paradigm becomes an obstacle to seeing across the divide represented by the various dichotomies discussed above, and this leads to the present fundamental problems in reaching out and mainstreaming its ideas. As a result, it unfortunately remains a somewhat exotic agenda that exists at the margin of the overall development enterprise.

Those who focus their efforts on the preservation and promotion of indigenous knowledge also need to be aware of this encompassing economic-political reality. They must be willing to reach out to stakeholders that have partly conflicting agendas, to strategize and create alliances, and to recognize the implications of the fact that indigenous knowledge exists in an institutional and organizational context that goes much beyond the individual community. As part of this reorientation, it would be necessary to address the implicit argument that indigenous peoples, through their knowledge systems, somehow hold the key to a sustainable management of natural resources. This is too simple. Traditional institutions and organizations change, just like institutions and organizations everywhere else. They change for a variety of reasons, forced to try and adapt to changing external conditions. Some become obsolete and disappear, and most of the rest are more or less gradually transformed in the process.

Towards this, I offer to the indigenous knowledge community the practice and theory of comanagement as a potential avenue to explore. Comanagement (also referred to as "collaborative management" or "joint management") describes a partnership among different stakeholders for the purpose of managing specific resources. Key members in such a partnership will be the government agency with jurisdiction over the resource in

question and local residents and resource users. They will have reached an agreement specifying roles, responsibilities, and rights. Comanagement is characterized by a conscious and official distribution of responsibility that involves all legitimate and relevant stakeholders. It is recognized that not all responsibility can or should be devolved to the community, and the state will always retain some responsibility (G. Borrini-Feyerabend, ed., 1997; cf. also G. Borrini-Feyerabend 1996; E. Pinkerton and M. Weinstein 1995). Comanagement is becoming increasingly attractive to NGOs.

The comparative advantage of international development banks like the World Bank lies more on the macro level, in collaborating with governments in setting up stakeholder consultation processes and in reforming regulatory frameworks. A recent experience with formulating a sector strategy for the coastal zone in Ghana that I was involved in, relied heavily on organizing large-scale and exhaustive stakeholder consultations that spanned the whole coastline and involved hundreds of people representing all relevant stakeholders. Among them were local and regional traditional chiefs that represented the traditional chieftaincy system and thus brought traditional values and knowledge to bear on the issues at hand. This was an extremely rewarding experience for everybody who participated, and it set in motion processes in the coastal zone that are still unfolding (World Bank et al. 1997). This work benefited from earlier conceptual and policy-oriented work focusing on the interrelation between modern and traditional institutions in Africa (M. Dia 1996).

*Indigenous Organizations and Development* asserts that it makes good sense to combine development assistance and indigenous organizations. In this it is important that the various stakeholders, both on the national and the local level, both domestic and international, cooperate to create a smooth relation between various macro- and micro-level factors that are crucial to creating an enabling atmosphere on the local level. In this process, a better understanding between such diverse phenomena as indigenous knowledge, population growth, and environmental sustainability is emerging as crucial, and the two volumes will hopefully contribute to building this understanding. Hirschman (1994) has argued persuasively that we need to understand development as a process--as well as a growing capacity of--problem solving. This speaks to the importance of nurturing and crafting an integration of indigenous knowledge, institutions, local organizations, and political processes.

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## **Third World in the First: Development and Indigenous Peoples, by Elspeth Young, 1995. London and New York: Routledge. 304 pp.**

**Reviewed by James Waldram, Department of Native Studies, University of Saskatchewan**

This book compares Aboriginal peoples' experiences with processes of development in Canada and Australia. The emphasis is on remote areas of these two countries, and the comparison is striking. Particular attention is paid to government policies and selected industries, such as mining and tourism. Young also looks at the traditional, land-based economies of Aboriginal peoples in the two countries, and concludes her study with an examination of Aboriginal development initiatives. In the latter case, particular emphasis is placed on sustainable development as a strategy.

This is a lushly produced book, complete with many photographs, figures and tables. It demonstrates the value of international comparisons of Indigenous issues, and transcends academic disciplines. A geographer by training, Young focuses on the land and the relationship of Aboriginal peoples to it. Her extensive research, however, includes accessing historical and anthropological studies in addition to those of geography. The use of excerpts from her own field notes, recorded while undertaking research with Aboriginal peoples in the two countries, adds a humanistic, anthropological feel to her work.

The volume demonstrates some theoretical problems. Of particular note is Young's failure to adequately explain her adoption of the Third World paradigm as a framework for understanding Indigenous minorities within liberal, democratic states. She notes only in passing the existence of a Fourth World paradigm, which other authors have suggested more adequately describes the situation of these Indigenous peoples. We are left wondering why she rejects the Fourth World paradigm. The use of the Third World as a framework obfuscates the very real political and economic differences between