
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FROM THE MARGINS: LESSONS FROM CHIAPAS

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Abstract

This article addresses the problems associated with economic community development in marginal communities within Less Developed Nations, using the complex case of groups within a conflictive region of the state of Chiapas, Mexico. It shows how all parties to community development must negotiate with each other and the forces at play in these and similar situations, in order to overcome the many obstacles. It also explores the role of social scientists in the debate about what can be done to maintain and improve the economic viability of rural economies (other than out-migration), and how to do so in a sustainable and equitable manner. It closes calling for some means to maintain a "knowledge fund" to accumulate lessons about what works and what fails in such efforts.

WHO IS HELPING? NGOs and the New World Order

In the recent U.S. Census report of a serious underestimation of the undocumented in the U.S. as compared with the new 2000 data, the news did not surprise many people living here. As with major cities throughout Latin America and the Third World, we are experiencing the fall-out of the declining viability of rural agricultural communities around the world, a population that until very recently were the earth's numerical majority. No global problem remains so perniciously pervasive than the poverty of these marginalized areas of the globe, especially those places so devastated by the socioeconomic changes of the last two decades that out-migration to cities and to the industrialized "North" has come to be nearly the only viable basis of their current economies. With the rise of free trade agreements and

trade globalization, conditions continue to deteriorate, as the services and policies that once buffered globalization impacts on the low-income population have been scaled back or removed. The private sector, theorized to replace government with greater profitability and efficiency, is typically no where to be found, as there is rarely sufficient incentive. What has replaced the organizational impact of government, for many areas of the less developed globe, has been Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs). These organizations have proliferated and become a significant force of change in many parts of the world, yet in many cases we do not know much about what it is they do, how well they do it, and what could be learned from their approaches to the problem of the viability of the margins. Moreover, as I argue below, the structure of these NGO's rarely allows for the production of information that could serve to refine and perfect the kinds of interventions that will truly aid these communities at risk. Organizational goals and methods vary enormously. There is often little coordination of their efforts, and some are highly competitive, ideologically narrow in vision, and lacking in ability or interest in sharing what they have learned. Yet for many communities, NGOs are all there is, as organizations of aid in the process of improving their economic and knowledge conditions. Many bring with them views and visions of the work and the setting very much at variance with the people they are attempting to help, and with other potentials sources of aid. If so many are pinning their hopes on NGOs, both at the local level and as the symbol of a new direction in development assistance in the New World Order, it would be helpful to understand better how these organizations work, what local people think of them, and for those of us who have worked with NGOs for decades now, what kind of organizational action is efficacious, what works, and why? This is the starting place for my study.

Chiapas in Rebellion; Enter The NGO

NGOs are of particular significance in parts of the State of Chiapas, Mexico, because since the uprising by armed, anti-globalization peasant Mayas, who specifically declared war on the NAFTA agreements in their first communiqué, the state has been awash with them. Further, they arrived at a time when the state was downsizing its role as a social player in community development (CD), in the poorest state in the country. Further, many of the NGOs have embraced particular political positions within the political conflict, while others attempt to remain neutral. And finally, the current President envisions them playing a major role in returning Chiapas to a

state of peace. So the stakes are very high as regards their successful impact, yet little is really known about them, about what creates successful interventions, and about who is doing what. It appears if this new model of NGO-based social assistance is to be more successful than past efforts, there must be research done both on past efforts and on what is currently taking place. With the help of a colleague, Dr. Jeanne Simonelli, this is what I am aiming at, and this forms the basis of the discussion to follow.

Project Description:

What is the nature of their interventions and how do the goals and initiatives of NGOs and donors compare to those of the communities they seek to serve? Why do some programs fail and others succeed? Do NGO programs influence a community's ability to meet their own stated needs? What role can these organizations and their programs play in the transition from civil strife to social peace? These serve as touchstone questions here.

This research examines community development (CD) processes in conflictive areas of Chiapas, Mexico. I build on two decades of work with CD among Maya and other similar rural communities, and recent intensive research in the Santo Domingo region of the State. Expanding from two initial communities of inquiry and one non-governmental organization (NGO), the study examines the impacts of NGO interventions and CD processes as well as inquiry into other NGO interventions in the State. At one level, the research seeks to understand and assess the success of these interventions and the perceptions and expectations that drive the participation of stakeholders, with a goal of both specific advisory commentary and a testing of hypothesized CD intervention principles. At another more theoretical level, the study seeks to bridge the gap between radical critiques of development anthropology and the current practices of (applied) development anthropologists, generating a verifiable model of responsible community development that both addresses critiques of the past approaches, and provides a positive alternative. Thus, the proposed research aims at anthropological praxis, the combination of knowledge, theory, and action. I take as a model the interpretive and methodological framework refined by anthropologist June Nash. According to Escobar (1997:507):

“her reading of the contemporary Chiapas situation suggests an alternative meaning of development in the making as the region’s social movements press for a combination of cultural autonomy and democracy, on the one hand, and the construction of material and institutional infrastructure to improve local living conditions, on the other.....Nash’s exemplary work as an engaged anthropologist concerned with development is complemented by her active sponsorship of students in her fieldwork projects, [and] the publication of her works in Spanish...

The contemporary and pressing nature of the research derives from the theoretical debate and its implications for the discipline, but also from growing concerns about the role of NGOs in relation to the State. The case of Chiapas provides an appropriate arena to examine the latter, in the wake of changes in the political landscape of Mexico and the call by President-Elect Fox for cooperation and collaboration between the State and NGOs, as part of a peace plan (Cuarto Poder 2000). The first change in national political party in over fifty years coincides with a nascent process of reconciliation among groups and communities after six years of conflict associated with a popular rebellion against the former government (Rus 2000; Simonelli nd). On the local and regional level, political strife has been tied closely to alternative efforts and visions of social and economic betterment, some of them in turn tied to a history of involvement with international and national NGOs and their community development (CD) efforts. The new governmental initiatives to involve NGOs in the peace and development processes of the region increase the urgency of the kind of research presented here, as Chiapas enters into an era of possible changes.

Statement of the Problem

The continued failure by the nations of wealth and educational advantage to develop a rigorous approach to helping the disadvantaged communities of the world despite huge investments of resources and human effort may become one of the greatest historical legacies of the last fifty years. As we face another century, the howl and cry of the injustices of this situation from these quarters take ever darker turns. Whatever other significations are contained in the September 11 attacks, no one doubts the relationship between where they are seen positively and where there is poverty, injustice and suffering. The notion of transferring the Marshall Plan successes in Europe and Japan to the small traditions to the south has been for the most part a sustained failure. Ongoing efforts to invest in economic development nation-to-nation burdened many countries with huge amounts of debt without having significant impact on economic health, and in fact often leading to the enhancement of corruption and mismanagement. Striking out at the “grassroots,” as an alternative closer to the people in poverty, has led to the proliferation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which have sought by various means and with various ideologies, methods and directions, to transform the lives of the disadvantaged. This too has not fared well in most quarters. This

article discusses the role of NGOs in the specifically significant region of Mexico, within the State of Chiapas, where there has been social and political unrest since the rise of a rebel movement in 1994. I use a case study region and what I and one colleague (Dr. Jeanne Simonelli, of Wake Forest University) have found there in our research, to provide a discussion of a conceptual framework for comparative study of NGO interventions, and to address the issue of community development as a social science activity, and how this might contribute to bettering the economic and social conditions of the poor, globally. The goal is to better conceptualize and actualize economic development of the world's marginalized people.

In response, this project examines the efforts of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other development programs in Chiapas, Mexico, as a means of refining a model to provide researchers with a conceptual framework for comparative study, and organizations and communities with a guide to community development.

Non-governmental organizations often promote development initiatives that compensate for the decline in national public sector programs, such as taken place in the context of current forms of Neoliberalism. They also provide international humanitarian aid in cases where natural disasters, wars, or other kinds of precipitous large-scale disorder have put many people at risk. Ranging from well-endowed and familiar organizations like Save The Children to poorly financed local or regional programs, they bring diverse agendas and visions to their efforts (Black 1999:85-89; Edwards and Hulme 1996). Anthropologists such as myself are frequently involved in these programs, yet the discipline and social science generally have done little to provide a systematic critique of specific programs or construct a knowledge base to guide future efforts. In spite of ample involvement by social scientists in the development efforts in remote regions of LDCs, in 1997 Fisher noted that there were,

“...relatively few detailed studies of what is happening in particular places or within specific organizations, few analyses of the impact of NGO practices on relations of power among individuals, communities, and the state, and little attention to the discourse within which NGOs are presented as the solution to the problems of welfare service delivery, development, and democratization (441)”.

While some see NGO projects as a panacea for myriad development shortcomings (Bauzon 1992), others view their activities as just extensions of the neoliberal program, an organizational version of the progress oriented “action” anthropology of the 1950s and 60s preparing the uninformed to plug into the world market however they can. At one extreme, many NGOs internalize the notion that their programs are short term bridges on the long road to privatization, promoting economic opportunities which are seen as part of the process of liberalization (Duffield 1997: 174; Hackenberg 1999; Warren 1998:4; World Bank/NGOs 2000). Though under fewer political constraints than their official governmental cousins (GNGOs), in some cases NGOs were only providing a complementary service on a more local level (Gledhill 2000:184; Kaufman 1997:108). The idea is to prepare communities for globalism of the neoliberal model. At the other extreme, the organizations act as spokespersons for civil society in rebellion, seeing their alternative development initiatives as ways to subvert and circumvent the prejudicial system (Burgerman 1998; Nash 1998a; 1998b). While not directly linked to revolutionary programs, Orlove (1999: 199) notes that “...social movements have an affinity to NGOs that can promote them and channel their efforts”. But both approaches, and much of the spectrum between them, seem long on ideas and rhetoric, and short on results of any lasting sort. Given this, and the skewed and diverse set of perceptions, ideologies, and methods they utilize, what “good” do NGOs actually do? What role, if any, should anthropologists the social scientist who wants to make a difference take (Gardner and Lewis 1996: 160-168)?

The results of those studies that do examine specific projects and organizations highlight barriers to efficacious programs at all levels of action and involvement. Focusing on the relationship between organizational philosophy and program efficacy in Senegal, for example, Roberts notes that success on the local level was linked to the ways in which NGO staff replicated organizational donor ideals in actual programs (2000:159-171). However, Gezon cites the exclusion of targeted people from project design as a difficulty in going from ideals to structure (2000:200). She also notes that while some NGO projects undertake needs assessments with communities, these results are often ignored or used only to legitimize organizational undertakings (ibid 203-204). While inclusion of the target population and indigenous knowledge in program planning is a recent and frequent exhortation (Sillitoe 1998 ; Harper 1997), it is rarely seriously employed. Loker

(2000) points out that determining who speaks for which community interest may not be easy. This echoes Long's (1992:5) observation that when working with projects and the numerous stakeholders involved with them, we are dealing with "multiple realities". Moreover, while paying lip service to the need to consult with those who are to be aid recipients, donor organizations are still unable to translate that insight into program definition, vision or goals. Typically, by the time local people are consulted, basic assumptions about problems and solutions have already been made. In a video conference between World Bank representatives and members of a Chiapas weaving cooperative that was designed to get local input into Bank planning, the Bank was unable to envision a project that functioned outside of a preconceived model of how development should take place (Wake Forest 2000; see also Hines 2000:186-189). Such inflexibility in both ideology and practice can undermine projects from the outset. This is particularly true with those programs involved in humanitarian aid, where organizations are unable or unwilling to underwrite long periods of integrated analysis and capacity building (Earle and Simonelli 2000; Rew 1997:101-102). But it is also true of those whose ideological or sectoral (health, education, children, infrastructure) commitment serves as a heavy and distorted lens through which to view the problems, the people and the approach. Often this prejudice can be divined simply by a glance at the NGO.

The patterns of problems identified in these and other individual studies indicate that there are generalizations to be made concerning what works and what doesn't in community development, yet the social sciences are hard-pressed to embrace such a law-driven approach, it has been suggested that as there are too many exceptions for many to be able to create a hard-and-fast rule (Anonymous Reviewer 2000). This criticism echoes the paralyzing debate concerning anthropology's role in development which contrasts "development anthropology," and "anthropology of development" (Escobar 1997:501-505). In development anthropology, one is still directly engaged in application, while the other is "...primarily concerned with the socio-scientific analysis of development as a cultural, economic, and political process (Grillo 1997:2)". This conflict includes both the examination of aid agency actions (vs. popular agency) in a historical and political setting (Ferguson 1994) and the "discourses" of development (Escobar 1991, 1995). The latter view follows from Foucault's notions (1972), and defines the "development gaze" as a prejudiced way of looking at/knowing the development "subject". These analyses deepen our

understanding of the ethnocentrism of development efforts, their sociopolitical manifestations and ideological texts, but still don't provide for practical solutions, a contribution that anthropology should be able to make. Some would say their dedication to theorizing without applicable solutions to proffer simply make them one more part of the problem (Rosenau, 1992).

Anthropology's contribution to the body of knowledge concerning the overall human experience derives from our ability to accurately characterize the intersection of local level phenomenon with the larger global forces that influence individual daily life (Nash, 2001). In the area of development, the continuing dilemma lies between doing nothing with our extensive field-based knowledge and doing something that may ultimately be harmful (Sillitoe 1998:231). The paradox is that anthropology has provided an expert critique of problematic development without suggesting viable alternatives. We are able to see the problems but refrain from suggesting solutions. Opening up development discourse to deconstruction provides another arena for anthropological reflection, but does not suggest much in the way of constructing a social science of community development. In short, those who know don't do, and those who do, don't know.

In contrast to this impasse, we argue that verifiable, replicable and testable assumptions about what does and does not work in community development settings are possible and can provide a direction away from half a century of repeated failures, creating an anthropologically informed social science of community development (Earle and Simonelli 2000). This parallels Escobar's 1997 review of anthropology and development which moves away from some of his previous (1991; 1995) skepticism concerning the discipline's role in development. He advocates a stance that bridges the impasse between theory and practice through creative experimentation in the development field (Escobar 1997: 498). Citing works by Nash, Pigg, Ribeiro, and Hvalkof, he notes that these anthropologists provide "...further lessons for a reimagined articulation between anthropology and development and between theory and practice (Ibid 506; see also Borofsky 2000: 9)".

In the case of development then, the contribution of anthropology comes from examining both the developers and the recipients, assessing the economic processes, the political economy, the cultural logics, and the social landscape of rural communities, as well as

those of the NGOs tasked to help them. As social scientists we will clarify the process of NGO intervention in the development endeavor, while allowing analytic space for the subjects to speak to the same issue. At the same time, I avoid the naive notion that simply giving attention to indigenous knowledge and bottom-up decision-making can, of itself, lead to positive change in previously under empowered communities (Sillitoe 1999:233).

This examination of community development (CD) processes in Chiapas builds on two decades of work with CD among Maya and other rural communities, and recent intensive research in the Santo Domingo region of Mexico's most impoverished state. Using case studies in two communities and one non-governmental organization (NGO) as a source of initial comparison, the impacts of NGO interventions and CD processes in these and in numerous nearby communities will be examined. These results will form the basis of later participatory survey research focusing on other NGO interventions in the state, currently underway.

The contemporary and pressing nature of the research derives from the theoretical debate and its implications for the discipline, and further, from growing concerns about the role of NGOs in relation to the state. The case of Chiapas provides an appropriate and timely arena to examine both, in the wake of changes in the political landscape of Mexico and the call by President Fox for cooperation and collaboration between the state and NGOs, as part of a peace plan (Melel 2000a). The new government initiatives to involve NGOs in the peace and development processes of the region increase the urgency of the research presented here, as Chiapas enters an era of possibly volatile change. With whole regions in open defiance of authorities, massive militarization and security measures, declining resources and incomes, and growing out-migration to the U.S., the economic viability of Chiapas' communities has never been a more urgent, global issue.

At one level, the research will describe and assess the efficacy of NGO interventions and the perceptions and expectations that drive the participation of stakeholders, with a goal of both specific advisory commentary and a test of hypothesized CD intervention principles. At a more theoretical level, the study seeks to bridge the gap between radical critiques of development anthropology and the current practices of (applied) development anthropologists, generating a verifiable model of responsible community development that both addresses critiques of

the past approaches, and provides a positive alternative. Thus, the proposed research aims at anthropological praxis, the combination of knowledge, theory, and action.

Community Development, Chiapas & Globalization Theoretical Framework

Development Anthropology: Reconciling Radical Critiques With Reasonable Practice

Fifty years ago, few questioned the paternalistic model of progress that informed the concept of development. The transformation of the agrarian way of life was inevitable, if not good, and applied anthropologists were often the culturally skilled delivery agents of change. Within this ideology of modernization, all participants would be able to benefit from the prosperity of the wealthy nations and our work was simply to clear the path of obstacles (Bennett 1996:S29; Foster 1962, Mead 1961, Nunez del Prado 1973). With the rise of dependency theory (Cardoso 1981, Stavenhagen 1981) and other political-economic critiques of "Third World" development, the modernist promise of evolutionary prosperity was replaced by one of conflict. In this, the industrialized North prospered at the expense of the dependent and neo-colonized South, against which the latter needed to resist. Community development was at best seen as a palliative, at worst, an agent of capitalist penetration and increased pauperization of the poor (Lappe et al 1998).

Such critiques of modernist assumptions about progress and concern with discursive constructions of reality have lead to a contrast between "development anthropology," and "anthropology of development" (Escobar 1997:501-505). In development anthropology, one is still directly engaged in application, while the other is "primarily concerned with the socio-scientific analysis of development as a cultural, economic, and political process" (Grillo 1997: 2). This conflict includes both the examination of aid agency actions (vs. popular agency) in an historical and political setting (Ferguson 1994) and the "discourses" of development (Escobar 1991, 1995). The latter view follows from Foucault's notions (1972), and defines the "development gaze" as a prejudiced way of looking/knowing the development "subject." These analyses deepen our understanding of the ethnocentrism of development efforts, their sociopolitical manifestations and their

ideological texts, but still do not provide for practical solutions, a contribution that anthropology should be able to make.

Anthropology's contribution to the body of knowledge concerning the overall human experience derives from our ability to accurately characterize the intersection of local level phenomenon with the larger global forces that influence individual daily life. In the area of development, the continuing dilemma lies between doing nothing with our extensive field-based knowledge and doing something that may ultimately be harmful (Sillitoe 1998:231). The paradox is that anthropology has provided an expert critique of problematic development without suggesting viable alternatives. We are able to see the problems but refrain from suggesting solutions. Opening up development discourse to deconstruction provides another arena for anthropological reflection, but does not suggest much in the way of the constructing a social science of community development. Consequently, in the last decade, anthropology stood aloof as other disciplines and practitioners adopted our research models and our cultural insights. Caught between pandering to others' non-anthropological constructions and deconstruction, between imposed econometrics and discursive identities, it seemed that much of the discipline has largely failed its subjects (Hobart 1993).

More recently, however, anthropologists have begun to advocate a more active partnership role in the development process. Escobar's 1997 review of anthropology and development moves away from some of his previous (1991; 1995) skepticism concerning the discipline's role in development. He advocates a stance that bridges the impasse between theory and practice through creative experimentation in the development field (Escobar 1997: 498). Citing works by Nash, Pigg, Ribeiro, and Hvalkof, he notes that these anthropologists provide "further lessons for a reimagined articulation between anthropology and development and between theory and practice (Ibid 506)". This reflects debate in the discipline as a whole that calls for a public anthropology that "resists the facile farces that draw anthropologists into emphasizing theory in one context and practice in another (Borofsky 2000: 9)".

NGOs as Development Stakeholders

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) often promote development initiatives that compensate for the decline in national public sector programs or provide international humanitarian aid. Ranging from well-endowed and familiar organizations like Save The Children to under financed local or regional programs, they bring diverse agendas and visions to their efforts (Edwards and Hulme 1996). Roberts (2000:144) describes the “NGO phenomenon as a dimension of globalization driven by an international development enterprise that links rich with poor; benefactor with beneficiary; oppressor with liberator and oppressed.” Anthropologists are frequently involved in these programs, yet have done little to critique specific programs or construct a knowledge base to guide future efforts. NGOs are important stakeholders within the development process (Brokensha 1998:236). In spite of their involvement, in 1997, Fisher noted that there were

“relatively few detailed studies of what is happening in particular places or within specific organizations, few analyses of the impact of NGO practices on relations of power among individuals, communities, and the state, and little attention to the discourse within which NGOs are presented as the solution to the problems of welfare service delivery, development, and democratization (441)”.

While some see NGO projects as a panacea for myriad development shortcomings (Bauzon 1992), others view their activities as just extensions of the neoliberal program, an organizational version of the progress oriented “action” anthropology of the 1950s and 60s. At issue is whether the development projects sponsored by NGOs are part of the solution to the difficulties of the poor, or contributors to the problem (Escobar 1995; Blacklock and McDonald 1998). On the one extreme, many NGOs internalize the notion that their programs are short term bridges on the long road to privatization, promoting economic opportunities which are seen as part of the process of liberalization (Duffield 1997: 174; Hackenberg 1999; World Bank/NGOs 2000). At the other extreme, the organizations act as spokespersons for civil society in rebellion, seeing their alternative development initiatives as ways to subvert and circumvent the system (Burgerman 1998; Nash 1998a; 1998b). Given this skewed set of perceptions, what “good” do NGOs actually do? How do their activities derive from, or respond to, the transformations of late neo-colonialism (Abramson

1999:246-247; Nelson 1997: 461-462)? What role should anthropologists take?

In the past two years, a visible discussion has begun in anthropological arenas, focusing on a variety of questions concerning the involvement of anthropologists with NGO programs. (Roberts 2000) notes that as informed practitioners we must be concerned about involvement in a highly politicized arena of collaboration and competition among these organizations and their staff. (Gezon 2000) argues for the necessity of scholarly critiques and recommendations by involved anthropologists. (Earle and Simonelli 2000) direct inquiry towards developing a replicable process to guide a type of helping that does not damage long-term survival strategies or further burden already under-empowered people by initiating doomed experiments.

Both the literature and conference agendas for anthropological meetings reflect renewed interest within the discipline concerning tangible, replicable and practical applications of knowledge, and with the ethical obligations of the anthropologist as researcher, advocate, and/or activist. In the case of development then, the contribution of anthropology comes from examining both the developers and the recipients, assessing the economic processes, the political economy, the cultural logics, and the social landscape of rural communities, as well as those of the NGOs tasked to help them. As social scientists we seek to clarify the process of NGO intervention in the development endeavor, while allowing analytic space for the subjects to speak to the same issue. At the same time, we are moving away from the naive notion that attention to indigenous knowledge and bottom-up decision-making can, of itself, lead to positive change in previously under empowered communities (Sillitoe 1999:233).

Development and Rebellion: Chiapas Responds

Fifty years ago, few questioned the paternalistic model of progress that informed the concept of development at the time. The transformation of the agrarian ways of life was seen as inevitable, if not good, and applied anthropologists were often enlisted as the culturally skilled delivery agents of change. Within this ideology of modernization, all participants would be able to benefit from the prosperity of the wealthy nations; our work was simply to clear the path of obstacles (Bennett 1996:S29; Foster 1962, Mead 1961, Nunez del Prado 1973). With the rise of dependency theory (Cardoso 1981,

Stavenhagen 1981) and other political-economic critiques of "Third World" development, the modernist promise of evolutionary prosperity was replaced by one of conflict. In this, the industrialized North prospered at the expense of the dependent and neo-colonized South, against which the latter needed to resist. Developers were "...caught up in the gargantuan task of changing, shaping, homogenizing, and supposedly, improving the lot of the developed (Kaufman 1997:107)". At best, community development was seen as a palliative, at worst, an agent of capitalist penetration and increased pauperization of the poor (Lappe et al 1998; see also Hines 2000:237-241). Hence the popular term, the "Development of underdevelopment." From this perspective, the efforts at development of the less wealthy nations were to preserve colonial-like structures of dependency and inequity, not to overthrow them.

Though most development projects were capitalist in nature, prior to the end of the cold war, social concerns and goals were still incorporated into initiatives. As Loker notes, attention to issues such as social equity could counteract revolutionary tendencies among marginalized populations (1999:12). With the Soviet threat neutralized, development became linked not to modernizing projects, but instead to broader global economic ideology and changes. At the same time, the debt crises of the 1980s provided the rationale for coercing developing countries into externally dictated neoliberal programs based on liberal trade and fiscal restraint in social sectors (ibid: 13-14). Neoliberal and popular models of economic transformation came more into conflict than ever.

The January 1st, 1994 Zapatista uprising in Chiapas was a complex statement about the betrayal of the revolutionary and constitutional commitment to agrarian life and the nation's failure to protect the poor from these internationally-dictated structural adjustments. Coinciding with the signing of NAFTA, the rebellion was a response to long-standing patterns of interaction, exploitation, and discrimination (cf. Benjamin 1996; Collier and Quartiello 1994; Ross 1995). NAFTA became a metaphor for betrayal not because of what it would do, but because of what it communicated politically to many: the demise of the indigenous way of life (Earle 1994: 28).

An earlier stimulating event was the reform of Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution, which allowed for the private sale of communally held *ejido* land, something prohibited since revolutionary times. For

many of those impacted, this change institutionalized the symbolic violence against agrarian livelihood. The notion of betrayed agrarian reform communicated in this change was an underlying cause of subsequent conflict, but not because there had been no agrarian reform in the State. By 1975, over three quarters of the land in Chiapas was in the hands of the indigenous agrarian population, redistributed however in a fashion that replicated the elite system of patronage (Anaya 1997:7), reinforcing the traditional social structure and governmental control.

If the revolutionary failure is symbolized in complex land issues, it is also found in economic and social events (Gilly 1998). The fall in the price of oil in 1982, the subsequent collapse of the *peso*, and the international financial bailout, which followed, laid the groundwork for a decline in living standards for the indigenous and *campesino* peoples of Chiapas, along with many others. As the Mexican government sought still more loans in the beginning of 1986, the removal of food subsidies and a retreat from social programs became a component of the economic reforms mandated for continued international funding (cf. Gonzalez de la Rocha and Escobar Latapi 1991; Simonelli 1986). The timing of this decline parallels the escalation and expression of guerilla activity in the most marginal areas of the state, eventually coalescing at the moment of the signing of NAFTA. That this response occurred in Chiapas and not other all hard-pressed regions of Mexico most likely reflects the extreme dichotomy between a rich land and a poor people (Benjamin 1989; Harvey 1994; Navarro 1994; Rus 1995). The crises created by this kind of structural adjustment are the "...social face of the globalization of capital" (Smith 1997: 177-178)".

The practical shape of crisis in Chiapas is a familiar expression of the drawbacks of contemporary mainstream development models, a configuration that yields "...increasing pressures on those less well endowed to sell their labor, family life or environment cheaply in order to make a living" (Edwards et al 1999). While theorists debate the nature and intent of the development process, the plight of under-empowered peoples is to live within it. As individuals and communities contemplate the moral trade-off that often translates as options for survival, NGOs serve as global ombudsmen in the development endeavor (Loker 1999: 14). The proliferation of national and international NGOs has paralleled the expansion of the gap between the promise and the reality of privatization. The decline of social justice ideals and the substitution of market justice imperatives characteristic

of neoliberalism and economic globalization leaves NGOs as “...unhappy agents of a foreign aid system in decline” (Edwards et al 1999: 134; see also Fisher 1997”).

This assessment of the results of globalization implies that local groups are not able to defend their interests from ubiquitous market forces. In Chiapas, Nash sees “...an alternative meaning of development in the making as the region’s social movements press for a combination of cultural autonomy and democracy, on the one hand, and the construction of material and institutional infrastructure to improve local living conditions, on the other (in Escobar 1997: 507)”. Communities in Chiapas and elsewhere struggle for access to a “just market”, at times creating their own development programs, derived from strategic assessment of avenues for participation (Waterbury 1999; Earle, 1984). Thus, we argue that the ideal outcome is not total rejection of contemporary development models, but instead a drive towards improving one’s position in what Kearney (2000) calls the “class chain”. That is, seeking the best situation within the given context of inequity, by some very specific community-directed means.

Connecting Theory to Pilot Research

Help without Hurt: The Communities of the Santo Domingo

It is in this new climate of clash between waning social ideals and seeming economic imperatives that anthropologists are engaged as frequently uneasy consultants and planners. It is in this same context that Mexico’s most recent President has called for cooperation and collaboration between the State and NGOs, as part of a peace plan (Melel 2000). While there is an accumulating body of literature addressing issues of development and conflict resolution in other parts of the world, analyses from Chiapas are limited. This paucity does not reflect a lack of work by researchers in the State, but rather the political and ethical realities of publishing their work at this time. In lieu of this, sessions at professional meetings allow researchers to report findings and compare results in a less threatening forum.

The first change in national political party in over fifty years coincides with a nascent process of reconciliation among groups and communities after six years of conflict and violence associated with a popular rebellion against the former government (Rus 2000; Simonelli nd). On the local and regional level, political strife has been tied closely

to alternative efforts and visions of social and economic betterment, some of them, in turn, tied to a history of involvement with NGOs and their goals and projects, on the one hand, and GNGOs, on the other.

In Connecting Literature to Pilot Research:

In 1997, my colleague Simonelli began working with IDEFEM, a United Nations-funded NGO, whose official charge was to work with Guatemalan refugee communities in the Santo Domingo region. IDEFEM proposed and initiated numerous microproduction programs, and, like other aid agencies in the area, their failures far outnumbered their successes. Located in the village of PlayaChayotea Azul, the community of Playa was one of the communities groups included in the NGO programs.

Earle soon joined the project, and in the last three years, three to four short field visits per year have been made. My participation in the project added time depth and comparative data through my 25 years of research in the region, which focused on Nuevo San Juan Chamula, a community with a very different social and political profile. My 1979 and 1983 fieldwork in nearby Nuevo San Juan Chamula followed two years spent working with early NGOs in conflict-ridden Guatemala. His findings highlighted serious failures in community development in one Maya region (Earle 1983; 1984). By contrast, the Chiapas case I examined was more promising. At that time, they were, in fact, carrying out a self self-development program without outsiders and creating the kind of community that development agencies dream about, but rarely cause to appear (Earle 1988:257; see also Waterbury 1999). At the close of the two field periods, a series of development axioms were drawn from observing the relative success of the Chamula colonists. These were utilized in a community development project among Guatemalan refugees in the area (Earle 1984, 1994;Verrillo and Earle 1993).

Both Nuevo San Juan and Chayote are an outgrowth of the 1950s colonization of the Santo Domingo region by Mayas exiled from other areas by politics, religion, and demography. Some of these were highland people in search of land where they could grow coffee for sale and corn for survival. Others were regional Mayas whose parents spoke the Tojolobal language, but who rapidly lost their linguistic heritage as they colonized new lands. Beginning in the 1980s, refugees from the Guatemalan violence settled in the area. During this same period, the

internal conflict in Chiapas deepened, and public sector social provisioning declined as a result of structural adjustments associated with neoliberal reforms.

In response to the influx of refugees, aid agencies began to promote community development. These included local NGOs, government GNGO programs, and massive international aid. Most programs were proposed by donor agencies and reflected external donor policy and concerns. Social, economic and political upheaval in the area intensified after 1994. Refugee communities exceeded 120 settlements; Zapatista supporters declared the area autonomous, and the government established a formidable military presence.

Though divided politically, all settlements faced common problems, including economic uncertainty derived from limited land and access to markets and political uncertainty stemming from efforts to steer between the parties in conflict. They attempted to maintain a viable community internal organization, while negotiating complex relations with each other and a variety of outsiders, from federal immigration officials and mercenary middle middle-men to NGOs and anthropologists.

The village of Chayote was one of the earliest settlements established in the region and had at its heart an *ejido*, or cooperative land-holding group, founded by Maya and non-Maya settlers. In 1993, the CPlayahayote Azul community faction began a process of reflection, leading to a declaration of resistance in the *ejido's* assembly. They established their own school and health clinic but honored their commitment to provide cooperative agricultural labor, though refusing to participate in GNGO programs. They soon became a hub of resistance to the government for the region, and conflicts arose with the military and other *ejido* members who still supported the government institutions.

The two communities exemplify the variation in political affiliation in the region, yet for practical purposes, both tried for autonomy. Nuevo San Juan's efforts derived from continued identification as Tzotzil Maya, which allowed it to distance itself from party politics, though verbally backing the PRI. On the other hand, CPlayahayote rebels Azul identified themselves as a community-in-resistance, while disavowing any relationship to the armed Zapatistas. They made continued efforts to coexist with those on the other side of

the conflict. As part of the autonomous *municipio* of Tierra y Libertad, these were the only two community identities in a region that included groups of outright Zapatistas, others in resistance, but not in rebellion, and pro-government groups of all stripes and degrees.

As a community-in-resistance, Playa Azul made continued efforts to coexist with those on the other side of the conflict. As an alliance of fifteen households bound together by a common goal of transforming the social landscape through peaceful processes, the CPlayahayote community represented resistance writ largence on an everyday scale. They concentrated on creating alternatives to the institutions of government, such as health and education, as a means of resisting capitalist penetration. Their goal was integration into a more just market and the circumvention of the oppressive intermediaries that had always made a mockery of the notion of “free markets” and the level playing fields promised by neoliberal economic reformers. Moreover, as Mexicanized Tojolobal Mayas, they chose to construct their identity in alternative ways, reflecting astute, tactical assessments of immediate value. Situational identification as indigenous vs. campesino, emphasizing ethnicity in one context and class in another, reflected yet another form of resistance (cf Gledhill 2000:204). Their association with IDEFEM began in 1998, at the time of the dissolution of Tierra y Libertad, the autonomous municipality in the region. (Speed and Collier 2000).

Methodology Connecting Fieldwork to Research Assumptions:

Most IDEFEM projects were involved with small-scale horticulture and poultry ranching, activities easily realized by women who could continue to do their household work as well. With women as the point of entry into the system, the economic content of a project was viewed as an avenue by which other areas of interfamily and intercommunity relations would be democratized. Less attention was paid to whether the economic initiative actually succeeded than whether the women (and, by example, their spouses) learned new ideas about social and political participation (Mama Maquin 1994: 98). An outgrowth of these interventions was that several communities were able to produce amply and efficiently, but that NGOs paid little attention to the need to market the goods. The explicit goal of the project was the social transformation. In contrast, households were

interested in economic outcome. Here, a “successful” project on NGO terms was a failure to the community. The opposite may also be true. Roche (1999:43-44) describes Oxfam programs rated successful by stakeholders though they failed to meet the agency’s criteria for success.

While IDEFEM activities helped to integrate women into an independent economic sphere, male community members felt that NGOs were missing the point when they made no attempt to work in the area of coffee or milpa production, seen as men’s domain. Women pointed out that coffee production was the work of the family as a whole. When provided with resources to fund either a women’s cooperative bakery or technology for enhanced production of coffee, a struggle ensued. The choice of bread vs. coffee reflected a struggle between internal and external markets, security vs. risk, a gendered perception of what would best benefit the group. Coffee was felt to be more important to the community as a whole.

Often, the NGO did not agree with the prerogatives of the funding agency, just as the communities did not concur with the NGO’s assessment of their particular needs. IDEFEM’s reports and program studies made it clear that some problems lay in the way that both the UN and other funding agencies tended to compartmentalize projects (see also Harvey 1997). In one case, funds received from a European foundation were explicitly targeted at production with no consideration of commerce, as if the work alone would somehow transform the community’s life. In the case of the UN programs, there was no crossover between health and social projects, environmental programs and production. They, too, were uninterested in the question of commercialization. No one seemed interested in funding an integrated program of ecosystem planning, development and management, despite the fact that the idea of “integrated CD has existed in the literature for over twenty years (Earle 1984).

Definitions and Assumptions Principles

The foregoing discussion of pilot research and earlier review of similar development projects indicates that it is possible to identify repeating themes and problems in intervention strategies at all levels. This research will undertake to formalize this analysis through an ongoing reinvestigation of the assumptions listed below. I used as a methodological guide a model used for development impact assessment

(Roche 1999). In impact assessment, individual interventions are assessed as part of the agency accountability process. In this study of development efficacy, the process is to use assessment of individual interventions in order to construct generalized development guidelines.

For purposes of this and prior work, I have employed the following conceptual definitions:

Community: a loose alliance of households, united by common identity or goal, which have come together in order to facilitate a transformation in socioeconomic or political status households.

Internal Stakeholder: individual community members, with differing perceptions of what is “good” for the group. These include, but are not limited to, men vs. women; elders vs. younger members; politically active vs. neutral. Other stakeholder divisions include those based on access to resources, religion, ethnicity, and political party identification.

External Stakeholder: individual participants in the development process, including donors, NGO administrators, NGO fieldworkers, anthropologists, missionaries, and Mexican officials.

Development: programs of planned change.

Development Success: changes that increase the capacity of people to have social and economic control over their lives and the lives of those for whom they are responsible

“Just market”: the ability to command a price that accurately reflects the value of labor inputs into a product, in relationship to costs; equitable gain

Principles of Responsible Development

From my past research (Earle1984, Earle and Simonelli. 2000), reinforced and elaborated by the recent work discussed here, I have come to make a series of principles which I feel guide the CD thinking, planning and action arenas, and which I believe make a significant difference in terms of CD outcomes. These are:

1) **BALANCE.** Development interventions are more likely to achieve sustained success if they: make the organizational mission

explicit and understandable; reflect jointly planned, executed, evaluated and reported projects; promote reciprocity and symmetry in relationships with the community; stress diversification in productive activities, rather than pitting internal markets against external markets; strive toward ecological balance, and sustaining the natural environment; and avoid dependency relationships by limiting the timeframe of the agency's involvement with a project. All these are determined specifically on the basis of significant periods of in-depth field-work (ethnography) in the area to be worked with, as well as structures of ongoing evaluation.

2) INCLUSIVENESS. Interventions are more likely both to succeed and to have a positive role in the peace process if they: do not exacerbate existing and potential divisions within and between communities; are able to work within the power environment or "political landscape"; can identify all social groups affected by the intervention, including those who are not participants; and are able to work and communicate within the "cultural logic" and worldview of communities. Again, here ethnography is essential.

3) PLAYER PERSPECTIVES. The efficacy of development projects and of related interventions will be evaluated differently by external stakeholders, including variation between donors and the NGOs representing them; and NGO administrators and fieldworkers, and anthropological consultants. The assessment of projects and interventions as desirable will also vary. For example, in times of crises, donor foci will be directed toward perceived solutions to immediate problems. At other times, donor foci will reflect organizational interpretations of academically derived notions of appropriate action. Having and contextualizing these perspectives help with understandings of the whole process, including highly varied interpretations of the same or similar things. Examples are:

The efficacy of development projects and of related interventions will be evaluated differently by internal stakeholders, including variation within a community, and between a community and outsiders; that variation is likely to be determined by both gender and life-cycle stage.

a) Men will be more likely to favor interventions with value for external markets than women. Interventions that enhance ability to

participate in a “just market” are more likely to be described as efficacious.

b) Women will be more likely to favor interventions with value in the internal market. Interventions that enhance ability to provide for the family on a daily basis are more likely to be described as efficacious.

c) For both older men and women, interventions that provide a substitute for out migration are more likely to be described as efficacious. Projects that keep the household intact will be more advantageous.

Balancing these perspectives (re #1, #2) must be a part of the logic of CD work. Here we see an example of the danger of saying, on whatever subjective basis, that the "community wants X". Another one follows.

4.) ENGAGING RESOURCES. Communities will agree to participate in NGO projects even if they are determined to be useless by all internal stakeholders if the NGO is seen to control access to other valued resources, including information and information technology. Resource scarcity may motivate people to embrace interventions of no import, or even ones that are counter-productive, exemplifying the problem of consent, as opposed to a shared construction of the problems and solutions.

5. HOLISM APPLIED Programs designed to take into consideration all of these variables, and communicate them to communities for their assessment of programs and projects, will lead to a more effective and efficient use of community development dollars. We must always ask, then, what is the correct unit of CD (individual, household, community, region) for action and evaluative research, and has the intervention addressed that unit as a whole, and assessed all the relevant variables at play for that unit? Socially determined bounding frames will become apparent in ethnographic settings. For example, for Chayote, education projects work best at this time just with the people in resistance, while health clinics are best at the municipal (regional) level, and coffee marketing at the level of the whole *ejido*. Ethnographic research has sorted this out. Failure to do so can lead to more harm than good, as functional units are divided (re #1).

Conclusions

To date, anthropology has provided an expert critique of problematic development without suggesting viable alternatives. We are able to see the problems but refrain from suggesting solutions. Opening up development discourse to deconstruction provides another arena for anthropological reflection, but does not suggest much in the way of the constructing a social science of community development.

In contrast, this perspective uses holistic and testable criteria to span the divide between contrasting theoretical visions and debilitating discourse. In this way I seek to contribute to an anthropologically informed social science of community development. This contribution comes at a time in history when such a science, and the funds of knowledge it can marshal, have never been more critical. This is especially true in areas like Chiapas where informed economic participation might be an alternative to conflict. Using this insight to work with NGOs in the Río Santo Domingo part of Chiapas requires a development perspective that identifies the conditions that polarize communities politically while also refusing to propose initiatives that intensify that polarization. As Mexico reconsiders its political direction, the shared poverty of all groups in a stressed environment, as well as shared difficulties with interventions in the past, may provide a base from which to begin common development efforts. We must see this process clearly and fully, so as not to again fail.

In Chiapas and elsewhere, verifiable, replicable, and testable assumptions about what does and does not work in community development settings provides a direction away from decades of repeated failures. It moves anthropology into a leadership role in providing synergistic, rapidly communicated understandings of the pragmatic solutions to community development challenges. In an era of declining foreign aid, it provides donor organizations with a science-based template for more efficient use of their development dollars.

Continuing pilot research indicates that in Chiapas, region to region marketing of agricultural goods, bypassing both *coyotes* (informal intermediaries, usually exploitative) and official marketing agencies often frees producers from globally determined production initiatives. International sales of artisan items by cooperatives who seek out their

markets in Internet encounters, and anthropologists who provide producers with a working ethnography of both consumer consciousness and the societies it emanates from, can provide an alternative development strategy. Moreover, alternative trading organizations specializing in social responsibility marketing can help producers turn responsibility into capital. In essence, these and related means allow us to test the plausibility of using globalism to improve the entry position of historically marginalized players in the marketplace of value. Development becomes defense against the extremes of exploitation and rebellion, while providing the communication efficiency to remove unnecessary middle agents and provide an equitable price for goods produced. This represents a concrete legacy of our own research, in keeping with the goal of cumulative learning and documentation of failures and successes. It provides a means of testing our own understandings in the process laboratory of rural, indigenous community development, using an analysis of actual behaviors to ground theoretical discussions of how small scale producers are effected by development intervention.

We join concerns over authorial (top-down) development that transforms knowing subjects into preconceived objects to be “helped,” with ways to empower those community voices so they may help themselves. In this, communities become advisors, students, and participants in the move toward prosperity, autonomy and security.

Along with my colleague, Dr. Simonelli, I offer these generalizations as a provisional statement, not as an absolute rule or law-like proposition (and see Earle and Simonelli, 2000.) We are aware of exceptions, and expect that some readers will be aware of many as well. However, we note that guidelines such as these provide sensitivities, signposts that tell us what to look out for. I believe in the importance of this initial step into the world of practical generalizations, if any kind of a workable science is to emerge, and the pressing issue of viability of Third World economies is to be rationally addressed. The stability of Chiapas, the viability of the social sciences, and perhaps the future of human security and well-being in the world, hang in the balance.

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