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A critique of the socio-cultural approach to development planning

Dirk Kohnert ¹

'You need to reform ... Then and Now'
cartoon on misguided development policy



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Abstract: Development policy in the 1980s and 1990s sought to address the weaknesses of the economic development theories that had dominated development planning and the traditional modernisation theories that complemented them. The proliferation of strategies for overcoming technological and cultural dependence was a result of this rethinking. This so-called "socio-cultural" approach to development planning needs to be critically reviewed, as the example of development cooperation with the countries of sub-Saharan Africa shows.

Keywords: [Development aid](#), [ODA](#), [planning](#), [planning fallacy](#), [sociocultural evolution](#), [modernization theory](#), [Sub-Saharan Africa](#), [BMZ](#), [giz](#), [DED](#), [NGO](#)

JEL-Code: F35, F52, F54, H43, H84, N17, N47, O15, O17, O21, O22, Z13

¹ Dirk Kohnert, associated expert, [GIGA-Institute for African Affairs, Hamburg](#). 30 August 2024. - Author's revised version of: Kohnert, Dirk (1982): [A critique of the socio-cultural approach to development planning](#), *Intereconomics*, vol. 17 (6), Verlag Weltarchiv, Hamburg, pp. 296-301.

Development aid institutions, experts and politicians have rarely been so unanimous: development aid must focus greater attention on the Third World's poor, the majority of which are to be found in rural areas. Rural poverty therefore represents the main enemy. However, the fight against poverty is not just a morally justified end in itself and the development of the rural sector not purely a sectoral problem. An ever-increasing number of today's development experts have woken up to the fact that general economic and social progress (in both industrialised and developing countries) is intrinsically interwoven with the development of the rural areas in the Third World countries.²

Cartoon: *Policy on a level playing field ?*
Socio-cultural differences in development planning



Source: © toonpool.com, HSB-cartoon, 4-December 2008

According to reports by the World Bank and the OECD future prospects for the rural poor in Sub-Saharan Africa are particularly gloomy.³ The discrepancy between the abundant potential of natural resources and the starvation of many human beings in this region delineates the reasons behind poverty particularly clearly: poverty is not so much a problem of inadequate living-space or inhospitable natural conditions but rather more a social, political and economic problem.

Both development policies pursued by the former colonial powers as well as the policies of the young African nation-states and international development aid institutions have, on the whole, failed to improve the lot of the rural poor.⁴ Certain factors are, of course, completely or partly beyond the scope of influence of development experts, such as the lack of interest shown by the elites in many Third World countries towards removing existing poverty, or the insufficient extent of development aid. Apart from these factors, a combination of theoretical and practical-operational misjudgements has been the main reason for the failure of pro-poor development policies to date. Firstly, such misjudgements mean that poverty is not adequately recognised and recorded; secondly, they lead to the employment of unsuitable means in endeavouring to eliminate poverty; and thirdly, the wrong reference criteria are taken when

² Cf. H. P r i e b e, W. H a n k e I : Agricultural Policy in Developing Countries, in: INTERECONOMICS, No. 1/1981, p. 33; S. A m i n : Zur Theorie von Akkumulation und Entwicklung in der gegenwärtigen Weltgesellschaft (On the Theory of Accumulation and Development in the Present International Community), in: D. S e n g h a a s (ed.): Peripherer Kapitalismus, Frankfurt 1974, pp. 71-97.

³ W o r l d B a n k : Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Agenda for Action, Washington, D.C., Sept. 1981; J. P. L e w i s (ed.): Development Co-operation- 1980 Review, OECD, Paris, Nov. 1980, pp. 29-33.

⁴ Of. G. M y r d a l : Relief instead of DeveLopment Aid, in: INTERECONOMICS, No. 2/1981, pp. 86-89; J. H e y e r et al.: Rural Development in Tropical Africa, London 1981; R. H a n i s c h, R. T e t z l a f f (eds.): Die Überwindung der ländlichen Armut in der Dritten Welt (The Overcoming of Rural Poverty in the Third World), Frankfurt 1979, pp. 5-56, 185-240.

evaluating the success of a given project. Recently, revolutionary social upheavals in several of the countries on which donor country interest centres (Iran, Zimbabwe, El Salvador, Namibia, etc.) have increasingly endangered investments. Many countries, even in parts of West Africa, have recently witnessed a spread of seemingly irrational passive or active opposition by peasants against help from above.⁵ All these developments are forcing planners to redirect their attention towards the social environment of development projects.

German development aid advisors, for example, have stated that a decisive weak point in technical cooperation projects lies in the neglect of socio-structural and political environmental factors⁶. Also, representatives of the World Bank in West Africa illustrate with reference to various examples that too little interest has been shown for the "socio-economic environment", the result being the failure of numerous projects in West Africa.⁷ More or less concrete allusions such as these to the social conditions and effects of development policies are not new. They have played an increasing role in the discussion since the mid-seventies.⁸ Recent reflections on development policy have tried to eliminate the weak points in the economically oriented development theories which have up to now dominated development planning and the traditional modernisation theories complementary to them.⁹ The propagation of strategies geared towards overcoming technological and cultural dependence is one result of such rethinking.¹⁰ This article sets out to critically analyse the "socio-cultural approach" to development policies by referring to the case of Sub-Saharan Africa as seen from a socio-economist's point of view.

Emphasis on the Wrong Issues

The demand for a socio-cultural dialogue with the Third World and the growing interest in the problems attached to the "industrial civilisation"¹¹ exported to the developing countries quite rightly criticise the ethnocentric character inherent in many technical cooperation projects. This criticism underlines that technology is not merely a neutral factor but a social product, i.e. it has its roots in a definite context of utilisation, in specific, historically evolved, social

⁵ Cf., e.g., T. W a l l a c e : Agricultural Projects and Land in Northern Nigeria, in: Review of African Political Economy, Vol. 17, 1980, pp. 60-70; J. G o o d y : Rice-Burning and the Green Revolution in Northern Ghana, in: Journal of Development Studies, Vol. 16, 1980, pp. 136-155; P. A y : Agrarpolitik in Nigeria. Produktionssysteme der Bauern und die Hilflosigkeit von Entwicklungsexperten (Agricultural Policy in Nigeria. Production Systems of Farmers and the Helplessness of Development Experts), Institut für Afrikakunde, Hamburg 1980; A. A d a m s : The Senegal River Valley: What Kind of Change?, in: Review of African Political Economy, Vol. 10, 1977, pp. 33-59.

⁶ K. B o d e m e r : Schwachstellen von TZ-Projekten (Weak Points in Technical Cooperation Projects), in: Entwicklung und Zusammenarbeit, No. 4, 1979, pp. 18-20.

⁷ Saadat, F. v. Gigch: Lessons from the field: rural development in West Africa, in: Finance & Development, No. 4/1981, pp. 37-40.

⁸ Cf., e.g., E. R. M o r s s, J.K. H a t c h et al.: Strategies for Small Farmer Development. An Empirical Study of Rural Development Projects in the Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Nigeria, Bolivia, Colombia, Mexico, Paraguay and Peru, Vol. 1. Analysis; Vol. 2. Cases, Boulder, 1976 and the literature referred to there.

⁹ G. H a u c k : Das Elend der bürgerlichen Entwicklungstheorie (The Poverty of Bourgeois Development Theory), in: B. T i b i et al. (eds.): Handbuch 2. Unterentwicklung, Frankfurt 1976; H. B e r n s t e i n : Sociology of Underdevelopment vs. Sociology of Development?, in: D. L e h m a n n (ed.): Development Theory - Four Critical Studies, London 1979, pp. 77-106; D. Nohlen: Modernization and Dependence - An Outline and Critique of Competing Theories, in: INTERECONOMICS, No. 2/1980, pp. 81-85

¹⁰ Cf. D. K a n t o w s k y : Zerstörung bedeutet Wachstum (Destruction means Growth), in: Entwicklung und Zusammenarbeit, No. 2/1982, p. 6f.

¹¹ W. B : Gegen den Mythos der Konsumzivilisation - kulturelle Zusammenarbeit mit der Dritten Welt (Against the Myth of Consumptive Civilisation - Cultural Cooperation with the Third World), in: Das Parlament, No. 9, 1982.

forms of organisation, distribution of resources and value systems.¹² This reorientation of development policy, however, harbours many dangers. On the one hand, the demand for cultural identity could quite easily be the result of yearnings for a preindustrial "ideal world" born of the pressures of interdependence within the industrialised countries themselves. These are then projected onto the peasant communities in the Third World.¹³ The pessimistic alternative, "economic growth vs. quality of life", put forward by the Club of Rome or "Global 2000", the application of which even to industrialised countries is questionable due to the assumption that the political and social status quo will continue¹⁴, leads all the more in the case of the LLDCs to the emphasising of the wrong issues. For example, increasing labour productivity through modern technology may well be in the interest of an African smallholder farmer. The strict advocacy of labour-intensive - as opposed to capital-intensive - technologies for developing countries does not really get to the heart of the matter.¹⁵ The smallholder in the Sahel struggling for his existence is not faced with a choice between a happy life in a subsistence economy which allegedly covers his basic needs, or entering into an exchange economy characterised by greed and hatred, as is sometimes assumed.¹⁶ The level of his needs cannot be reduced at will as the subjectivist value theory propounded by Chayanov and others implicitly maintains.¹⁷ The starving smallholders are primarily interested in securing an existence for their families; and this is not threatened mainly by the lack of "quality of the population"¹⁸, i.e. the lack of achievement motivation, entrepreneurial spirit, competition-mindedness, discipline and formal schooling, or by the imposition of alien value systems, but by the shortage of material resources.

There are two main reasons for this shortage: Firstly, the relatively low level of development of the forces of production, which is hardly likely to be overcome without economic growth in the context of a furtherance of the exchange economy. This does not automatically have to follow the pattern of the capitalist civilizational process in Europe. Secondly, the uneven distribution of social, political, and economic power. Precisely in allegedly classless, rural West Africa starvation is not primarily caused by inhospitable natural factors but is rather more a product of a specific socio-economic development.¹⁹ The main task of development work and a necessary, if not sufficient, condition for social progress is therefore an increase in per capita economic resources within the target group. A form of development planning embracing this task, however, should not just, alongside material transfer, concentrate on "opening up the markets" or implanting the market mechanism - supplemented by investments in "human capital" - as presently demanded by many neo-liberal social

¹² D. Kantowsky, op. cit., p. 7; W. S. Saint, E.W. Coward: Agriculture and Behavioral Science: Emerging Orientations, in: Science, Vol. 197, 1977, p. 734.

¹³ B. Tibi: Entwicklungspolitik ist kein Feld für exotisch-romantische Sehnsüchte (Development Policy is No Place for Exotic and Romantic Longings), in: Entwicklung und Zusammenarbeit, Vol. 23, No. 2/1982, p. 4f.

¹⁴ Cf. E. Gärtner: Global 2000 - Vorzüge und Mängel der amerikanischen Weltstudie (Good Points and Bad Points of the American Report), in: Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik, Vol. 26, No. 10/1981, pp. 1221-1235

¹⁵ G. Mann: Das entwicklungspolitisch stumpfe Instrument der angepassten Technologie (The Blunt Development Policy Instrument of Appropriate Technology), in: Entwicklung und ländlicher Raum, Vol. 15, No. 4/1981, p. 6.

¹⁶ D. Kantowsky, op. cit., pp. 6-7.

¹⁷ For a criticism of this theory see U. Patnaik: Neo-Populism and Marxism: the Chayanovian View of the Agrarian Question and its Fundamental Fallacy, in: Journal of Peasant Studies, Vol. 6, 1979, pp. 375-420.

¹⁸ T.W. Schultz: Ökonomie der Armut (Economics of Poverty), in: Entwicklungspolitik-Materialien, No. 69, Bonn 1981, pp. 131-141.

¹⁹ Cf. Kohnert, Dirk (1982): 'Klassenbildung im ländlichen Nigeria - Das Beispiel der Savannenbauern im Nupeland'. Arbeiten aus dem Institut für Afrika-Kunde N° 42, Hamburg, 1982, 490 p.

scientists.²⁰ Changes in the social structure should be intentionally employed by development planning.

Danger of Social Engineering

Cartoon: *the peer-review: source of socio-cultural misunderstanding?*



Source: © [Gado](#), 1982

Research on developing countries, which is increasingly devoted to analysing socio-cultural barriers to development and separating them analytically from the natural or economic conditions for development, tends to regard value systems and attitudes as absolute. Socio-cultural factors, however, cannot be seen separately from the historic context in which specific social structures emerged; these have developed in reaction to and in interaction with socio- structural and material processes of civilisation.²¹ The isolation of socio-cultural factors is questionable since, according to the prevailing understanding of science, although the existence of varying norms and attitudes can be established and possible contradictions within the norm system or between objectives and means made clear to those affected, the decisive question remains. This means that the question of whether the attitudes observed are really in the interest of the socio-economic development of the target group (ideology critique) cannot be answered from this point of view. The socio-cultural approach thus carries the risk of social engineering, i.e. the subtle manipulation of those affected by development aid in line with the interests or ideologies of ruling groups. The concentration of the attention of recent development strategies on the *ex-ante* evaluation of socio-cultural factors corresponds to the aforementioned and criticised neo-positivist objective-means dichotomy, in which the objectives/norms are accepted as invariable data. This placing of emphasis is probably also due to administrative and financial factors and to an exaggerated orientation by project management towards traditional success criteria. However, the "open solution approach" recommended as an alternative to hitherto existing development planning, which is primarily geared to the process of opinion formation within the target group during project implementation, requires fundamental rethinking by development planners. Alongside the *ex-*

²⁰ World Bank, 1981, op. cit.; T.W. Schultz, op. cit., p. 131; J. D o n g e s, L. M e I l e r - O h I s e n : Außenwirtschaftsstrategien und Industrialisierung in Entwicklungsländern (Foreign Trade Strategies and Industrialisation in Developing Countries), Töbingen, 1978.

²¹ N. E I i a s : Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation (On the Process of Civilisation), Berne, 1969

ante evaluation, the emphasis will have to shift towards the ongoing evaluation of projects, and in particular towards the promotion of self-monitoring and of self-evaluating capabilities within the target groups.²²

Inadequate Target Group Specification

The socio-cultural approach also reveals weaknesses with regard to the basic problem of a poverty-oriented development strategy, namely the exact specification of the intended target group. The determination of groups characterised by homogeneous social and/or economic constraints (constraint analysis) is often regarded as the central problem of target group specification.²³ Constraint typologies, however, such as the division into "biophysical" and "socio-cultural" development barriers, are usually carried out on too high a level of ideal-typological abstraction and, more important still, they can vary considerably depending on the selected socio-structural aggregation level of the entity under investigation. The differentiation between "natural" and "social" constraints depends on the social stratum of those affected. It therefore requires preliminary knowledge of the social stratification of the target population. A typology of development barriers can thus at most be employed as an additional criterion - following the analysis of the social structure - for target group specification.

The inadequate selectivity of constraint analyses can even be observed if attention is focussed on an (allegedly) low level of socio-economic aggregation - such as that of smallholder production in certain regions in Sub-Saharan Africa. This will be illustrated by the classification of the allegedly "natural" so-called "land constraints".

As opposed to countries in Latin America and Asia, many regions in Sub-Saharan Africa are known as so-called "excess land regions", in which communal land ownership still prevails and the clearing of the bush areas still represents the primary barrier towards the expansion of agricultural production.²⁴

Unfavourable natural conditions, seasonal labour bottlenecks, the lack of willingness to take risks and the generally low productivity of the "subsistence sector" are viewed as the main obstacles to increasing production (and income).²⁵ It is argued that since, under such circumstances, it is easier for African smallholders to secure their subsistence than for the rural population in Latin America or Asia, they are for this reason less interested in producing for the market.²⁶

This line of argument, however, neglects the fact that even in typical "excess land regions" in the West African Guinea savannah, indeed even in a village with a so-called "communal" land

²² K. M. Fischer, F. Mühlenberg et al.: *Ländliche Entwicklung; ein Leitfaden zur Konzeption, Planung und Durchführung armutsorientierter Entwicklungsprojekte* (Rural Development; a guideline for the concept, planning and implementation of poverty-oriented development projects), Bonn 1978, p. 325 f.

²³ K.M. Fischer, F. Mühlenberg et al., op.cit., pp. 156-181.

²⁴ E.R. Morss, J.K. Hatch et al., op.cit., pp. 146-149; World Bank: *World Development Report - 1980*, Washington D.C. 1980, p. 85f.

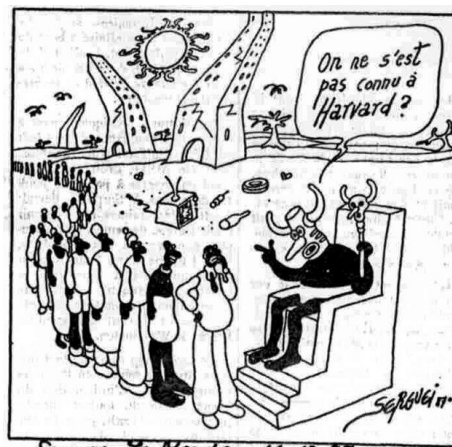
²⁵ D.W. Norman et al.: *Technical Change and the Small Farmer in Hausaland, Northern Nigeria*. African Rural Economy Paper, Michigan State University, No. 21, 1979; U. Lele: *The Design of Rural Development-Lessons from Africa*, J. Hopkins University Press, 1975, pp. 23, 189

²⁶ E.R. Morss, J.K. Hatch et al., op. cit., pp. 146-149

ownership system ²⁷, the land can be extremely unevenly distributed (per capita and per household) both with regard to quantity and quality: whereas over the past decades large farmers have acquired so much land that their families alone cannot work it, the land available to smallholders no longer guarantees subsistence level; the latter are therefore forced to seek sources of subsidiary income (usually as day labourers).²⁸ The unfounded assumption of socio-structural homogeneity within the African "smallholders" leads to a division between 'natural' (e.g. land) and 'socio-cultural' (e.g. achievement motivation, willingness to take risks) barriers to development which does not correspond to existing realities. In terms of project design, this approach leads to the creation of a catalogue of measures that only serve to exacerbate existing inequalities among the 'rural poor'.²⁹

"Cultural Dialogue" vs. Material Transfer

Cartoon: ' ... didn't we meet in Harvard ?'
on the modernity of occult belief in contemporary Africa



Source: *Le Monde*, 11.12.87
 Source: © French cartoonist, Serguei Goizauskas,
Le Monde, 11 December 1987

There is also the danger that a socio-cultural reorientation of development policy will make a virtue out of necessity, i.e. in the face of increasing financial bottlenecks in development aid in the donor countries, the importance of material transfers for the starving in the Third World could be played down and their objective needs downgraded by pointing the finger at the extravagance of the respective elites and referring to "consumer ideologies", which are to be replaced by the offer of a "cultural dialogue".

The deficit of development planning in rural areas in Sub-Saharan Africa up to now, therefore, has not so much been the lack of consideration of socio-cultural constraints, but rather more the inadequate specification of the target groups among the "rural poor" and the lack of readiness to evaluate (or to promote the self-evaluation of) the actual development interests of the target groups themselves and to prioritise this factor in planning. An essential prerequisite for the specification of target groups is the abandonment of the common populist

²⁷ Due to the development of the commodity sector - not least in connection with extensive irrigation projects or the governmentally subsidised "Green Revolution" (see T. Wallace, op. cit.; J. Gody, op. cit.) - this property system often only exists on paper.

²⁸ D. Kohnert, op. cit.

²⁹ T. Wallace, op. cit., pp. 60-70; J. Heyer, G. Williams et al., op. cit.

hypotheses of homogeneity of the "rural poor" or of the "class of African smallholders", which allegedly stands united face to face with other urban or rural interest groups.³⁰ Such assumptions regarding the homogeneity of African farmers must be replaced by patient empirical analyses of the social structure of respective target populations - both *ex-ante* and project-accompanying. This would provide a basis for an immediate reaction to any adverse effects projects might have on the social structure.

Steering the Course of Socio-structural Development

The revised socio-cultural approach proposed should not be understood as a mere means of improving target group specification, it is not only a prerequisite for a poverty-oriented development strategy and for an assessment of the success of technical cooperation projects. This approach paves the way for new possibilities in development planning via steering of the course of socio-structural development. Varying social structures, for example, can exert differing effects on the quantities produced and the range of production, irrespective of changes in the system of relative prices.³¹ This means that projects aimed at favouring domestic food production should not solely or primarily be based on perfecting the market mechanism, as is the case in the development policies presently pursued by the World Bank.³² Ignoring the process of dissolution of the farming community may well counteract an otherwise absolutely expedient policy geared towards changing relative prices in favour of domestic food production. Efforts must therefore be made to assist steering the rural process of class formation so that it fits in with the planned development projects. It must be borne in mind that the use of capital and/or labour of the farmers within development projects may have completely differing effects on the organisation of the farmers and operational units, depending on which social stratum the farmers belong to. In extreme cases the effects may be quite the opposite of the intended ones.³³

A planned steering of the development of the social structure would have to supplement the "technical cooperation" practised hitherto by a new kind of "social cooperation". Before the tools necessary for such a step can be developed, however, development planning must focus much more of its attention on a systematic analysis of the still largely unknown socio-structural implications of development aid in individual LLDCs, taking into account the overall effects. Research in this respect should concentrate on the following problem areas:

- (1) Effects of the expansion of production for the market on the traditional organisation of work and family structures. Transformation from social relations based on the value in use to those based on values in exchange e.g. in the family, in relations within the village community, in prestige systems, in traditional patronage systems (indebtedness). Possible transformation of communal types of work into wage labour. Types of dissolution of the patriarchal "extended family" and changes in the socio-economic position of man and woman inside and outside of the family.

³⁰ Cf. D. K o h n e r t : Rural Class Differentiation in Nigeria- Theory and Practice, in: Afrika-Spektrum, Vol. 14, No. 3/1979, pp. 295-315; D. Kohnert, 1981, op. cit

³¹ For more details, see G. Elwert : Überleben in Krisen, kapitalistische Entwicklung und traditionelle Solidarität. Zur Ökonomie und Sozialstruktur eines westafrikanischen Bauerndorfes (Surviving in Crises, Capitalist Development and Traditional Solidarity. On the Economic System and Social Structure of a West African Farming Village), in: Zeitschrift für Soziologie, Vol. 9, No. 4/1980, pp. 343-365.

³² World Bank, 1981, op. cit

³³ See more details D. K o h n e r t, op. cit

- (2) Effects of irrigation projects, of the "green revolution", of the commercialisation of production, etc. on land ownership, on the access to new means of production and on the increase in labour productivity.
- (3) Possible contribution of development projects to the social differentiation of the farming community. The emergence of "strategic groups" ³⁴ within the context of development projects, which may well form themselves into a class through the appropriation of new sources of income. Possible variations of the problems mentioned in (1) and (2) specific to the social strata or classes. Effects of the bureaucratisation of development processes, induced by development aid, on the potential monopolisation of existing democratic decision-making structures and on the initiative and the conflict/ articulation ability of the farmers. Emergence of specific forms of group or class consciousness and action patterns.
- (4) Research into the interdependence between the development of traditional and new religious movements, e.g. of occult belief systems (magic and witchcraft, witch-hunting), Islamisation, etc., and socio-economic power structures and its effect on social differentiation.
- (5) Research into the effects of the high social status of project managers and the living and working conditions of the development experts both on the ability to cooperate with the "rural poor" and on the regional distribution of development projects.³⁵ A closer look at the extent of corruption and nepotism/patronage in and around projects and their effects on project success.

Operational Problems

A more comprehensive incorporation of sociologists and ethnologists in project planning and recourse to the already published sociological and ethnological literature on the affected target regions (e.g. Human Relation Area Files, secondary analyses of already published data material etc.) would represent a step in the right direction. However, such an incorporation of sociological and ethnological research alone is not enough to eliminate the illustrated weak points in development planning. The limited perspective of many development experts criticised above not only leads to an unacceptably selective perception of the problem of poverty (inadequate target group specification) and to the selection of inadequate means for its eradication (market mechanism, cultural dialogue). The populist approach is not even aware of this deficiency, since it uses unsuitable criteria to assess project success. Even in the social cost-benefit analyses which take into account distributional effects, there is, for example, a tendency to aggregate costs and benefits attributable to completely heterogeneous social groups.³⁶

The already mentioned theoretical lack of precision in the target group specification of the "rural poor" based on the populist conception of a (homogeneous) farming community is also combined with a more practical or operational limitation of approach. The obstacles to an

³⁴ H.D. Evers : Group Conflict and Class Formation in South-East Asia, in: H. D. Evers (ed.): Modernization in South-East Asia, Oxford University Press, 1973; H. D. Evers : Sequential Patterns of Strategic Group Formation and Political Change in South-East Asia, Working Paper, Sociology Faculty of the University of Bielefeld, 1982.

³⁵ Cf. R. Chambers : Rural Poverty Unperceived: Problems and Remedies, in: World Development, Vol. 9, No. 1/1981, pp. 1-19.

³⁶ Cf. G. A. Amin : Project Appraisal and Income Distribution, in: World Development, Vol. 6, No. 2/1978, pp. 139-152; A.T. Sadiq : A Note on some Practical Limitations of Social Cost-Benefit Analysis Measures, in: World Development, Vol. 6, No. 2/1978, pp. 221-226.

identification of the target group of poor smallholders are not only rooted in the nature of poverty itself but also in the social status and the living and working conditions of the development experts.³⁷ Together with other aspects of poverty, such as the lack of resources, of political power and of the ability to articulate their problems, the spatial and social isolation of the poor are the factors most responsible for the fact that they are often overlooked by the "rural development tourists" (Chambers). Six typical and interrelated factors responsible for this selective perception emerge:

- (1) The concentration of development projects in the vicinity of urban centres and existing transport channels.
- (2) The concentration on the direct effects within the projects and the neglect of external effects, which particularly affect the smallholders.
- (3) The concentration of the participatory efforts and of aid on the (supra-regional and local) elites, opinion leaders and "progressive farmers" or on the beneficiaries of previous measures of development aid.
- (4) The disregard of women in the planning and implementation of projects and in the evaluation of project success.
- (5) The restriction of preliminary investigations to the dry season or to regions which are accessible all year round.
- (6) Overspecialisation by the experts, thus preventing an overall analysis of the poverty problem.

Shifts in Emphasis by Project Planners

From what has been said it is obvious that a shift in emphasis in development project planning is essential. It is of prime importance to ensure that the target group of smallholders is adequately defined and demarcated. In this respect we believe that alongside the self-appraisal of the village population affected, which for reasons of power structures is not likely to lead to the desired success, a combined qualitative and quantitative delimitation of income would be the best method.³⁸ The latter, however, is very time- and finance consuming, since it usually requires socio-economic surveying of the target population throughout the entire year; if advantage cannot be taken of already existing agro-economic field surveys, second-best solutions must be sought.³⁹ However, even a purely qualitative survey of income leads to considerable operational problems which make thorough preliminary socioeconomic surveys indispensable.⁴⁰ Secondly, the selection of the target population and region should be guided more by the search for the real poor and not by the needs of development experts. Thirdly, since the extent of local participation represents a decisive factor for project success⁴¹ a detailed evaluation of the objective interests of the target group must be taken as the starting-

³⁷ Cf. R. C h a m b e r s, op. cit.; B e t k e et al.: Partner, Pläne und Projekte: Die personelle Hilfe der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in West Malaysia (Partners, Plans and Projects: the Personnel Aid by the Federal Republic of Germany in West Malaysia), Bielefelder Studien zur Entwicklungssoziologie, Breitenbach, Saarbrücken 1978.

³⁸ For details of method see D. K o h n e r t, 1981 and 1979, op. cit.

³⁹ Possibilities would be typical class-specific combinations of primary and subsidiary sources of income (e.g. agriculture and wage labour for smallholders) or class-specific levels of the use of the means of production or of the size of operating units as indicators.

⁴⁰ For example, because those sources of income associated with a low social status, such as that of a rural day-labourer, are often kept secret because of a feeling of shame, or because parts of subsistence production are not recognised as income (see E v e r s, 1982, op. cit.).

⁴¹ E.R. Morss, J.K. Hatch et al., op. cit., pp. 202-208.

point and guideline for project planning. Therefore, projects with an "open solution approach" should be given more importance than in the past.

In all three areas mentioned above, however, there is a substantial deficit with regard to the development of effective and operationalizable research methods. The plea for a reorientation in development planning is, therefore, at the same time a plea for more extensive basic research in the field of target group specification, identification of needs within the target group and, in particular, the realization of target group needs in participatory measures by the donor countries.

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Résumé : La politique de développement des années 1980 et 1990 cherchait à remédier aux faiblesses des théories du développement économique qui avaient dominé la planification du développement et des théories traditionnelles de la modernisation qui les complétaient. La prolifération de stratégies visant à surmonter les dépendances technologiques et culturelles est le résultat de cette refonte. Cette approche dite « socioculturelle » de la planification du développement nécessite une révision critique, comme le montre l'exemple de la coopération au développement avec les pays d'Afrique subsaharienne.

Zusammenfassung : Die Entwicklungspolitik der 1980er und 1990er Jahre versuchte, die Schwächen der ökonomischen Entwicklungstheorien, die die Entwicklungsplanung dominiert hatten, und der traditionellen Modernisierungstheorien, die sie ergänzten, zu beheben. Die Verbreitung von Strategien zur Überwindung technologischer und kultureller Abhängigkeiten war ein Ergebnis dieses Umdenkens. Dieser sogenannte „soziokulturelle“ Ansatz der Entwicklungsplanung bedarf einer kritischen Überprüfung wie am Beispiel der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit mit den Ländern Subsahara-Afrikas gezeigt wird.