

Overcoming the Neoliberal Paradigm: Sustainable Popular Development

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Neoliberalism is exacerbating the polarization of society in all of its dimensions. Structural adjustments, with their program for international economic integration and public sector austerity on the domestic front have radically reduced the possibilities for equitable growth and the satisfaction of social needs. For most Latin Americans, this neoliberal opening is a nightmare. Falling real income, increasing unemployment and the accelerated withdrawal of social safety nets leaves us with few alternatives.

A significant number of people, however, have chosen to attempt to construct their own independent paths to survival. At present many of these strategies are no more than precarious arrangements to assure the income needed to hold body and soul together. They involve a combination traditional forms of production for increasing local self-sufficiency, financed by other activities in the same region or elsewhere; at present, people are forced to migrate, often accepting jobs in the most unfortunate of circumstances, with a consequent deterioration of their own lives and contributing to the unraveling of culture and society.

This unexpected response by millions who are unwilling to accept the inevitability of their absorption into the neoliberal quagmire offers a point of departure for alternative strategies. These alternatives are now being explored by myriad communities and scholars throughout the hemisphere; the contradictions of neoliberal development are so profound that even the international development community now recognizes their importance as a way to responding to the present crisis and searching for a progressive transitional route towards a better world. They are so important, that a new literature is focusing on grassroots approaches, including the exploration of problems related to participation and gender, while new organizations have emerged to take advantage of the political space that this opening is creating and to use the resources that are becoming available.

Many of these alternatives are emerging from concern about the need to search for a new approach to sustainability. This paper focuses on the problems of developing a strategy for sustainable development. Sustainability has become an important part of the discussion of development. It is increasingly clear to practitioners and academics alike that our thinking about development strategies must change; unless different approaches are allowed to thrive, the prevailing strategy of international economic integration with open borders will destroy our capacity to undertake these tasks. These new approaches require more than the defense of our natural environment. The conservation of a region's ecosystems depends on more than a political recognition of the importance of the problem. It also requires the strengthening and reconstruction of the social and economic capacity of people with the knowledge and ability to engage in the productive activities required for protecting and enriching the natural systems in which these resources exist. This paper turns to the task of exploring a strategy of sustainable development; it builds upon the principles of a diversified productive base, creative use of local resource base, and local participation in planning and implementation.

The Heritage of Development

Today's dual economy is an anachronism. While internationalization promises higher profits for capital than ever before, the contradictions bred by impoverishment are provoking a world wide rebellion. The international expansion of capital integrates resources and people into a polar system of great wealth accompanied by poverty and despoliation. Although this expansion has created vast extensions of land that have been denuded of their primary cover, it can no longer be profitably cultivated; in the process, large hoards of people are forced into precarious conditions in rural areas or urban slums; this waste of natural and human resources imposes a huge burden on society, not only in terms of opportunities foregone, but also for the costs of managing the social control and welfare tasks.

Official development theory seeks the solutions to poverty in market-led structural changes. International development experts and environmentalists alike join in an effort to wrench these groups from their regions, blending the arguments of economic efficiency with those of natural destruction to justify their removal. But these strategies raise two important questions: 1) is a new era of growth in its current mode either possible or desirable given environmental limitations? and 2) given the historical record, is there demonstrated evidence that new levels of growth will provide for greater economic (and therefore political and social) equity amongst diverse groups of nations, regions, communities, and people?

The answers to both these questions are a resounding NO. A market-driven strategy will not bridge the chasm between rich and poor, with all its negative implications, characteristic of today's dualisms. Instead, an approach that recognizes the limits of natural resource exploitation and capital expansion is proposed, one that addresses the issues of poverty and sustainability by offering a program of rural development for those presently excluded, a program that eventually would also ameliorate conditions in the rest of society. Both the increasing number of poor people and the accumulating environmental problems require solutions that are less market dependent; that take into account the redundancy of large portions of the population to the current framework for production and economic growth, and, therefore, provide for these people by creating a system in which communities can survive without complete integration into the global marketplace.

Investigations show that when given the chance and access to resources, the poor are more likely than other groups to engage in direct actions to protect and improve the environment. From this perspective, then, an alternative development model requires new ways to encourage the direct participation of peasant and indigenous communities in a program of job creation in rural areas to increase incomes and improve living standards. By proposing policies that encourage and safeguard rural producers in their efforts to become once again a vibrant and viable social and productive force, this essay proposes to contribute to an awareness of the deliberate steps needed to promote sustainability.

The essay identifies many opportunities to reflect on the importance of sustainability, and the possibilities of implementing approaches which move us in a new direction. But it also suggests that there are significant obstacles to such progress. Overcoming these obstacles requires more than well-

intentioned policies; it requires a new correlation of social forces, a move towards broad-based democratic participation in all aspects of life, within each country and in the concert of nations. Strategies to face these challenges must respond to the dual challenges of insulating these communities from further encroachment and assuring their viability.

In this alternative view, the world system is one of increasing duality, polarized between the rich and poor –nations, regions, communities, and individuals. A small number of nations dominate the global power structure, guiding production and determining welfare levels. The other nations compete among themselves to offer lucrative conditions that will entice the corporate and financial powers to locate within their boundaries. Similarly, regions and communities within nations engage in self-destructive forms of bargaining –compromising the welfare of their workers and the building of their own infrastructure– in an attempt to outbid each other for the fruits of global growth. This dynamic is not conducive to promoting sustainable development. The regions unable to attract investment suffer the ignoble fate of losers in a permanent economic olympics, condemned to oblivion on the world stage. In their struggle for survival within the global marketplace, many of the world's rural populations are doomed to marginality and permanent poverty.

Among the many questions raised by this discussion, some of the more important ones might be grouped into the following areas:

- What is the relationship between poverty and environmental degradation?
- Can the obstacles to sustainability be overcome by raising national per capita income levels?
- Can policies directed towards poverty eradication also contribute to reducing pressures on the environment?
- Are wealthier people around the world confronting the problems of sustainability responsibly? What is their level of responsibility to support environmental protection and conservation in areas inhabited by the poor?¹

Sustainability is not possible in rural Latin America as long as the expansion of capital enlarges the ranks of the poor and impedes their access to the resources needed for mere survival. Capitalism no longer needs growing armies of unemployed to ensure low wages, nor need it control vast areas to secure regular access to the raw materials and primary products for its productive machine; these inputs are now assured by new institutional arrangements that modified social and productive structures to fit the needs of capital. At present, however, great excesses are generated, excesses that impoverish people and ravage their regions. Profound changes are required to facilitate a strategy of sustainable development: in the last section we explore such an approach, suggesting that it may be possible and necessary to promote a new form of development: *a structure local autonomy that*

¹This list might also be joined by a question about the relationship between population growth, poverty and sustainability. I do not address this issues because in Latin America most research shows that the behavior of demographic variables depends on other fundamental factors of the nature and pace of development, such as those discussed in this body of this essay.

allows people to rebuild their rural societies, produce goods and services in a sustainable fashion while expanding the environmental stewardship services they have always provided.

A. Sustainability

Sustainable development has become a powerful and controversial theme, creating seemingly impossible goals for policy makers and development practitioners. Virtually everyone now couches their proposals for change in terms of its contribution to "sustainability." There is a widespread acknowledgment that *present levels of per capita resource consumption in the richer countries cannot possibly be generalized* to people living in the rest of the world; many argue that present levels of consumption cannot be maintained, even for those groups who now enjoy high levels of material consumption.² In this new discourse, resources encompass not just inherited natural capital, including raw materials (such as soil, sub-soil products, good quality air and water, forests, oceans and wetlands), but also the earth's capacity to absorb the wastes produced by our productive systems; of course, the analysis of resources also includes considerations about the quality of the built environments in which we live and work. (An excellent introduction to the underlying discussion can be found in Wilson 1992.)

The concern for sustainability has become global, reflecting the widespread fear of the deterioration in the quality of life. Existing productive systems and consumption patterns threaten the continuity of the existing social organization. The inequitable and undemocratic nature of current patterns of development raises the specter of the unraveling of present systems –social, political, productive and even those of personal wealth. A different structure, more attuned to the earth's possibilities for supporting and reproducing life, must replace them.

To address questions of sustainability, then, is to confront the fundamental dilemmas facing the development community today. While the trickle-down approaches to economic progress enrich a few and stimulate growth in "modern" economies and sectors within traditional societies, they do not address most people's needs; moreover, they contributed to depleting the world's store of natural wealth and to a deterioration in the quality of our natural environment.

In the ultimate analysis, we rediscover that in present conditions, the very accumulation of wealth creates poverty. While the poor often survive in scandalous conditions and are forced to contribute to further degradation, they do so because they know no alternatives. Even in the poorest of countries, social chasms not only prevent resources from being used to ameliorate their situation, but actually compound the damage by forcing people from their communities and denying them the opportunities to devise their own solutions. For this reason, the search for sustainability involves a dual strategy: on the one hand, it must involve an unleashing of the bonds that restrain people from strengthening their own organizations, or creating new ones, to use their relatively meager resources

²In this sense, we reject the notion that what is being sustained is growth itself, rather than a *process* that aims to contribute to improved welfare of people in an environment whose integrity is being protected.

to search for an alternative and autonomous resolution to their problems. On the other hand, a sustainable development strategy must contribute to the forging of a new social pact, cemented in the recognition that the eradication of poverty and the democratic incorporation of the disenfranchised into a more diverse productive structure are essential.

Sustainability, is not "simply" a matter of the environment, economic justice, and development. It is also about people and our survival as individuals and cultures. It is, most significantly, a question of whether and the way in which diverse groups of people will continue to survive. In fact, the burgeoning literature about the move towards sustainability celebrates the many groups who have successfully adapted their cultural heritages, unique forms of social and productive organization, and specific ways of relating to their natural environments.

Sustainability, then, is about the struggle for diversity in all its dimensions. International campaigns to conserve germplasm, to protect endangered species, and to create reserves of the biosphere are multiplying in reaction to the mounting offensive, while communities and their hard pressed members struggle against powerful external forces to defend their individuality, their rights and ability to survive while trying to provide for their brethren. The concern for biodiversity, in its broadest sense, encompasses not only threatened flora and fauna, but also the survivability of these human communities, as stewards of the natural environment and as producers.

Internationalization has stymied this movement towards diversity. The powerful economic groups that shape the world economy (transnational corporations and financial institutions, and influential local powers, among others) are striving to break down these individual or regional traits, molding us into more homogenous and tractable social groups. They would position us to support the existing structure of inequality and to engage in productive employment; and, for those lucky enough to enjoy high enough incomes, to become customers.

B. Review of the literature

In contrast to the generalized theories about the development process and sophisticated models of economic growth, the literature on sustainable development offers a mixture of high ethical principles, manuals for practical organization and implementation, and very concrete case studies of successes and failures. In this section we offer a rapid overview of some of the general approaches and solutions characteristic of this literature that might be suitable for various regions and problems. Rather than attempt to be comprehensive, this discussion is meant to convey the flavor of the discussion and the directions for future work. More than anything else, it is meant to reinforce the growing conviction that sustainable development may be an idea "whose time has come;" its implementation requires challenging not only the self-interest of the wealthy minority, but also the consumption package which is defining our quality of life. This is the real challenge we face today.

Sustainability is a process rather than a set of well specified goals. It involves modifying processes in nature, the economy and society. It has become more fashionable as people have discovered that

increasing production or even national wealth does not guarantee improving living standards and a higher quality of life; but the challenges of environmental protection are perhaps the most immediate force making the discussion so important. There are fundamental ethical questions about the sustainability of a global structure that perpetuates high degrees of international inequality while working with rural communities with little chance of satisfying even the most basic of their needs. These overall questions go far beyond the scope of this paper, which addresses strategies to promote a greater degree of sustainability in rural development. But for an effort to be successful it will also contribute to modifications in national development programs conducive to greater popular participation in their design and implementation.

A strategy to promote sustainability must focus on the importance of local participation and control over the way in which people live and work. The question of local or regional autonomy and autarchy is an important part of any discussion of national and international integration. The issues of autonomy versus cooperation and coordination are very much related to others having to do with self-sufficiency versus international specialization. The analysis of the previous sections places strategies for sustainability at the opposite end of the spectrum from the prescriptions of the neoliberal reforms. But yet, the advocates of sustainability recognize that the choices are not this simple: industrial products and technologies will not be rejected simply because they involve hierarchical control and maddeningly alienated work. The response must be more reflective, and confront the realities of an urbanized global society in crisis, with some nations incapable of providing for the most elemental needs of their citizens, while at the same time permitting others to enrich themselves while ransacking its storehouse of natural resources. In what follows we will briefly review some of the strategies proposed to promote sustainable development in different contexts.

C. Food self-sufficiency and the relationship between production and consumption

The first issue that must be dealt with squarely is that of self-sufficiency versus integration into the global trading system with a tendency towards specialization based on monocropping systems. Sustainability need not be tantamount to autarchy, although it is conducive to a much lower degree of specialization in all areas of production and social organization. Food self-sufficiency emerged as a necessity in many societies because of the precariousness of international trading systems; specific culinary traditions developed on the basis of highly localized knowledge of fruits and vegetables, herbs and spices. Although the introduction of green revolution technologies raised the productive potential of food producers tremendously, we soon found out how hard it was to reach this potential and the high social and environmental costs that such a program might entail.

Food self-sufficiency is a controversial objective that cogently raises the question of autonomy. Development practitioners are virtually unanimous in rejecting calls for an extreme position, although Mexico's declaration in favor of such a program in 1980 to the World Food Council was broadly applauded by third world representatives. Today the discussion is more complex, for there is general agreement on two contradictory factors in the debate:

1) on the one hand, local production of basic commodities which can be produced equally well but more efficiently elsewhere is a luxury few societies can afford, *if and only if* the resources not dedicated to the production of these traded goods can find productive employment elsewhere; and

2) on the other hand, there are probably few exceptions to the observation that greater local production of such commodities contributes to higher nutritional standards and better health indices. In the context of today's societies, in which inequality is the rule and the forces discriminating against the rural poor legion, a greater degree of autonomy in the provision of the material basis for an adequate standard of living is likely to be an important part of any program of regional sustainability. It will contribute to creating more productive jobs and an interest in better stewardship over natural resources.

There are many parts of the world in which such a strategy would constitute a wasteful luxury. It would involve the diversion of resources from other uses which could be more productive in contributing to the availability of goods for trading. But even in circumstances in which wholesale importation of basic commodities is advisable, people concerned with sustainable development raise questions about modifying local diets so that they are more attuned to the productive possibilities of their regions; in the current scene, the tendency to substitute imported products for traditional foods is particularly troublesome with terrible consequences for human welfare in many societies.³

Food self-sufficiency, however, is only part of a broader strategy of productive diversification whose tenets are very much a part of the sustainability movement. The principles of greater self-reliance are fundamental for the whole range of products and services which a society would like to assure itself. Historically, rural denizens never have been 'just' farmers, or anything else, for that matter. Rather, rural communities were characterized by the *diversity of the productive activities in which they engaged to assure their subsistence*. It was only the aberration of transferring models of large-scale commercial agriculture to development thinking in the Third World that misled many into ignoring the multifaceted nature of traditional rural productive systems. Sustainable development strategies directly face this problem, attempting to reintroduce this diversity, as they grapple with problems of appropriate scales of operation and product mix.

Productive diversification related to a pattern of local needs and resources is another important expression of this line of thought. To the extent that people are not involved in the design and implementation of programs to assure their own consumption needs, they are also going to have less appreciation of the impact of their demands on the rest of society and the natural environment. Thus, the approach discussed in the literature being reviewed here places a great deal of importance of

³The complexity of the task of ending hunger is widely recognized. But recent literature has stressed the social rather than the technical (or supply-based) origins of famine and hunger; Sen (1981, 1982) is a particularly effective exponent of this point, while others have gone into greater detail about the "social origins" of food strategies and crises (Barracough 1991). The "modernization" of urban diets in Nigeria, by substituting wheat and rice for sorghum and millet, is an egregious case of creating dependency, reducing opportunities for peasant producers and raising the social cost of feeding a nation (see Andrae and Beckman 1985).

some direct relationship among the people involved in the planning of production and those examining the question of what levels of consumption are possible.

D. Popular participation, social justice, and autonomy

Sustainability is about direct participation. If there is one constant in the diverse literature in the area, it is the recognition that the movement has emerged from the grassroots to participate in and support intermediate level NGOs which claim to speak for the extraordinary proliferation of community groups and civic organizations which are beginning to demand an increasing role in the national policy debate.

These demands and the responses from official agencies on the multilateral and national levels are quite instructive. There is a generalized agreement among practitioners that sustainable development policies cannot be designed or implemented from above.⁴ To be successful they require the direct participation of the intended beneficiaries and others who might be impacted. But there is also general agreement that this participation must involve more than a mere consultative role. For such an approach to work, it requires that the powerful become aware of the need to integrate people into *real* power structures in order to confront the major problems of our day; this entails a redistribution of both political and economic power, a fundamental prerequisite for any program for sustainability, as most of the technical analyses point out that existing patterns of creating and perpetuating these inequalities lead to environmental degradation. (e.g., Boyce 1994; Goodland and Daly 1993)

In this formulation, sustainability is not simply about environmental preservation. It is about the active participation of people in the understanding of the dynamics of natural systems and the redesign of productive systems that will allow them to be productive while conserving the planet's ability to host uncounted future generations. It is an approach to the problem of "empowerment", another word which has also become popular. Perhaps, the most telling aspects of the literature on sustainability is the cumulus of examples of the way in which people can and do "act in solidarity with each other when the state isn't watching" to solve common problems and initiate creative experiments for social innovation. (Friedmann, 1992:168-171; also see Ostrom 1993) Of course, the life work of Albert Hirschman offers countless examples of the ways in which the NGOs and other grassroots groups have been successful in exerting pressure to modify development projects

⁴This is the theme of Stiefel and Wolfe's book (1994), summarizing a broad range of experience about popular participation. They point to the "declining state capacity to provide services and reduce income inequalities," accompanied by an equal reduction in "public confidence in the legitimacy of its efforts." When joined with the processes of political democratization, it is not surprising that the international community is "looking to 'participation' as a means of making their development projects function better, helping people cope... [and] as an indispensable dimension of the environmental policies ... that can no longer be evaded or postponed." (p. 19)

as part of their own (local) perception of development priorities.⁵ Interestingly enough, however, under special circumstances, the state itself may (be forced to) play a creative role in encouraging or "liberating" creative participatory energies to promote programs of local development and social justice which also contribute to moving the society in the direction of sustainability (Alves, 1994; Tendler, 1993).

Lest we become too sanguine, much of the literature shows how and why the state does not operate to "empower" the downtrodden. The difficult juncture of the late 1980s forced the Mexican government to finance grassroots development schemes through local mobilization in communities dispersed throughout the country; the Solidarity program was highly regarded by the international press and development community as an effective welfare (and vote) program, but did little to create permanent productive opportunities for the participants, who were rarely able to continue once the official programs were terminated; Colombia's later copy of the program promises to offer no more opportunities for the poor. In his path-breaking examination of problems of soil erosion, Blakie goes further to explain that market signals generally push government into programs which benefit the rich and that much of the productivity enhancing research is misguided, but his most general criticism is one that neatly encapsulates much of the criticism of development experience of the past half-century: "the emphasis is upon particular commodities isolated from social, economic and environmental context." (1985: ch.2)

In the final analysis, a program focusing on sustainability must also deal with poverty. There is a widespread recognition that poverty and environmental destruction go hand in hand, although less thought has been directed towards the enormous environmental problems occasioned by the present consumption standards of the affluent, throughout the world. In the coming period, economic progress itself will depend on involving the grassroots groups to help the affluent find ways to control their consumption and in the organization of development programs which offer material progress for the poor and better stewardship of the planet's resources.

E. A strategy of democratic participation for rural diversification and productive improvement

Sustainable development is an approach to productive reorganization that encompasses the combined experiences of local groups throughout the world. The techniques for implementation vary greatly among regions and ecosystems. A single common denominator pervades this work: the need for effective democratic participation in the design and implementation of projects; its centrality is evident in the titles of some the excellent writing on the subject: Ben Abdallah and Engelhard, 1993; Calderon, et al., 1992; Machado, et al., 1993; Nuñez, 1993. Another lesson from recent experience is the importance of creating networks to support and defend this work; without the mutual

⁵In a recent book, Rodwin and Schön (1994) offer us the opportunity to explore Albert Hirschman's singular contributions to development theory and practice. Emphasizing the key of placing people at the center of the process, we have learned from Hirschman that to succeed these actors must become integrated into the larger processes of which they are a part.

reinforcement that the international grouping of NGOs provides, the individual units would not be as effective in obtaining funds for their projects, in obtaining technical assistance for their implementation, and political support against intransigent or incredulous local and national politicians and institutions. (Arruda, 1993; Friedmann and Rangan, 1993) The successes are due, however, not just to the tenacity and sacrifice of committed organizational workers and local participants, but also to the forging of a support structure, nationally and internationally, of workers, peasants, scholars and activists, who are willing to mobilize to support the spontaneous or well-organized efforts of individual groups throughout the world who are promoting projects of democratic participation for sustainable development. Organizations are forming, alliances recast, experiences reevaluated; in Latin America one of the most promising is the RIAD (Red Interamericana de Agriculturas y Democracia, 1993) with headquarters in Chile.

Sustainable development, however, is not an approach that will be accepted, simply because "its time has come." The opening of the multilateral development community to the NGOs and other grassroots groups, including the long term commitment of organizations like the InterAmerican Foundation in the USA, the IICA in Costa Rica and numerous foundations from western Europe to support such efforts, is not just a token gesture by powerful agencies to the powerless; rather, it reflects the recognition that these base level groups have been effectively mobilizing people and resources to achieve measurable improvements in living standards while contributing noticeably to protect the environment. Such victories signal the beginning, not the end of a process.

Furthermore, recognition does not mean acceptance of the goals or even the principles of the sustainable development community. As we have repeatedly stressed in the preceding pages, the prevailing model of industrial development has created structures of concentrated wealth and power which systematically generate social and environmental problems on a global scale. In the process, small but powerful elites have consolidated their control in many societies, and countless others benefit from the spoils of a consumption model that the system has engendered; this is an unsustainable pattern of production and consumption, a model which can be made to be more efficient, less contaminating, but which in the end will continue to be inviable. Vested interests actively deny access to resources, to employment opportunities, to even the minimum standards of amenities to enormous segments of humanity, while wasting exorbitant amounts on ostentatious expressions of consumption for a privileged few.

Sustainable development, in the final analysis, involves a political struggle for control over the productive apparatus. It requires a redefinition of not only what and how we produce but also of who will be allowed produce and for what ends. For organizations involved in projects of sustainable development in rural areas, the conflict will center around control of mechanisms of local political and economic power, and the use of resources. The struggle to assure a greater voice in the process for peasants, indigenous populations, women, and other underprivileged minorities, will not assure that their decisions will lead to sustainable development. But such broad-based democratic participation will create the basis for a more equitable distribution of wealth, one of the first prerequisites for forging a strategy of sustainable development.

F. The varieties of sustainable development

1) *The regions that get left behind*: International economic integration will not affect all peoples equally. In the case of the NAFTA, for example, large segments in all three countries will remain in the backwaters of international progress. To some degree, these people are in regions that have the unique opportunity to take advantage of their status as marginal. Many of these regions are peopled with groups of indigenous origin who still treasure much of the experience that has been passed down through the generation; recent research in the Third World on ethnobotany, ethnobiology, agrobiolgy and agroforestry is attempting to capture some of this wisdom. This work is showing that the productive potential of traditional agriculture is many times what is currently obtained, that there are cultural factors which prevent the full application of this knowledge (including, of course, the prevalent disdain for indigenous culture, except as a consumption good for tourists and eccentric intellectuals), and that some of our discoveries about these systems are transferable among cultures, as well as useful in improving cultivation systems used by "modern" farmers. Finally, as we conduct more research on these native cultural practices, we are learning that the native practitioners have begun to integrate more recent technological advances to improve productivity and reduce the amount of labor required in production.

In these regions the redevelopment of the "peasant economy" is both desirable and urgent. It is not simply a matter of rescuing ancient cultures, but rather of taking advantage of an important cultural and productive heritage to provide solutions to the problems of today and tomorrow. *It is not a question of "reinventing" the peasant economy*, but rather of joining with their own organizations to carve out political spaces which will allow them to exercise their autonomy, to define ways in which their organizations will guide production for themselves and for commerce with the rest of the society. Once again, the technocratic identification of productive mechanisms and the cataloging of systems of indigenous knowledge (which, for example, are now the order of the day among transnational corporations looking for new sources of germplasm for their biotechnological advances), are not going to reverse the structure of discrimination, unless accompanied by effective political participation. (Nuñez 1993)

These regions that get left behind will have many opportunities to explore ways in which to use their resource endowments in creative ways. Among the most important are projects administered by local community groups which begin to diversify their productive base, using sources of renewable energy, and evaluating the natural environment to develop new products or find new ways of adding value to traditional technologies and goods; projects mentioned in the literature include the harnessing of solar, geothermal, and aeolic energy for food processing, improving the quality and developing systems to increase the output of artisan crafts (or marketing them so that they command better prices), developing facilities for recreation and institutional arrangements to permit outsiders to gain an appreciation of indigenous cultures. The opportunities to seek out new ways of organizing the natural resources base are great and the initiatives to implement such programs are gradually finding respondents interested in exploring this and other alternatives. (Barkin, 1994; 1992)

2) *The centers of biodiversity*: The world's scientific and environmental community has mobilized to identify and protect an increasing number of particularly valued areas. These "biosphere reserves"

in the wilds and urban "heritage" centers are guardians of part of the ecosystem's natural and produced treasures. But they are also controversial battlefields where science and community are struggling for an operational definition of environmental protection and sustainability. The lines are drawn most clearly in the efforts to create nucleus areas in the designated biosphere reserves where people are not permitted to intrude; in some cases, the designation -or some similar status, such as national park- actually involves the removal of local inhabitants from the area in the name of the environment. On a more general level, the growing concern for protecting endangered species has led to conflicts between local populations which have traditionally coexisted with these species, exploiting them in sustainable ways, until the powerful forces of the market led to increased kill rates that threatened their very survival.

While there is no one generalized solution to the conflicting needs and goals of the groups involved in these regions, it does seem that the philosophical approach of "sustainability" does offer some insights. One promising proposal suggests creating "peasant reserves of the biosphere" or "neighborhood restoration clubs" in which local communities are encouraged to continue living within a region, husbanding the resources. In exchange, the "outside world" would accept the obligation to ensure that the community was able to enjoy a socially acceptable quality of life with economic opportunities similar to those of other groups and full political participation at all levels. (One particularly interesting example of this approach is the attempt to create such a model in the Chimalapas region of southwestern Oaxaca in Mexico, an attempt which has overcome many political obstacles, but still has not been completely successful.) Other approaches which embody this approach, involve organizing the local communities which formerly were engaged in predatory activities to participate in (or actually help design) protective activities as part of a strategy of productive diversification for community development, which would include ecotourism but could not be limited to this type of activity, because research has shown them to be too sporadic and insecure to offer economic security for most communities.

G. Autonomous Development: A strategy for sustainability

Sustainable development is not consistent with the expansion of "modern" commercial agriculture. Specialized production based on use of machinery and/or agrochemicals that emerged from the "green revolution" approach to technological development has produced vast volumes of food and other primary products; the social and environmental costs, however, are proving to be incalculable. Commercialized rural development has brought in its wake the progressive marginality of peasant and indigenous populations.

Global integration is creating opportunities for some, nightmares for many. Domestic production is adjusting to the signals of the international market, responding to the demands from abroad and importing those goods that can be acquired more inexpensively elsewhere. Urban-industrial expansion has created poles of attraction for people and their activities that cannot be absorbed productively or healthfully. Urban slums and deteriorating neighborhoods house people seeking marginal jobs while local governments are overwhelmed by the impossible tasks of administering these burgeoning areas with inadequate budgets. At the same time, peasant communities are being

dismembered, their residents forced to emigrate and abandon traditional production systems. they also cease to be stewards of the ecosystems of which they are a part.

In this juxtaposition of winners and losers, a new strategy for rural development must be considered: a strategy that revalues the contribution of traditional production strategies. In the present world economy, the vast majority of rural producers in the third world cannot compete on world markets with basic food stuffs and many other primary products: the technology and financial might of farmers in the richer nations combine with the political necessity to export their surpluses to drive down international prices, often below the real costs of production in the third world, especially if these farmers were to receive a competitive wage. Unless insulated in some way, their traditional products only have ready markets within the narrow confines of communities that are suffering a similar fate.

Marginal rural producers offer an important promise: if encouraged to continue producing, they can support themselves and make important contributions to the rest of society. In contrast, if prevailing rural policies in third world countries define efficiency by the criteria of the international market, based on the political and technological structure of the industrialized nations, peasants will be driven from their traditional planting programs, and food imports will begin to compete for scarce foreign exchange with capital goods and other national priorities, as has happened in many countries. (Barkin, Batt and DeWalt 1991) The approach suggested by the search for sustainability and popular participation is to create mechanisms whereby peasants and indigenous communities find support to continue cultivating in their own regions. Even by the strictest criteria of neoclassical economics, this approach should not be dismissed as inefficient protectionism, since most of the resources involved in this process would have little or no opportunity cost for society as a whole.⁶

In effect, we are proposing the formalization of a autonomous production system. By recognizing the permanence of a sharply stratified society, the country will be in a better position to design policies that recognize and take advantage of these differences to improve the welfare of groups in both sectors. A strategy that offers succor to rural communities, a means to make productive diversification possible, will make the management of growth easier in those areas developing links with the international economy. But more importantly, such a strategy will offer an opportunity for

⁶This is a crucial element. Many analysts dismiss peasant producers as working on too small a scale and with too few resources to be efficient. While it is possible and even necessary to promote increased productivity, consistent with a strategy of sustainable production, as defined by agroecologists, the proposal to encourage them to remain as productive members of their communities should be implemented under existing conditions.

In much of Latin America, if peasants ceased to produce basic crops, the lands and inputs are not often simply transferable to other farmers for commercial output. The low opportunity costs of primary production in peasant and indigenous regions derives from the lack of alternative productive employment for the people and the lands in this sector. Although the people would generally have to seek income in the "informal sector," their contribution to national output would be meager. The difference between the social criteria for evaluating the cost of this style of production and the market valuation is based on the determination of the sacrifices *society* would make in undertaking one or the other option. The theoretical basis for this approach harks back to the initial essay of W. Arthur Lewis (1954) and subsequent developments that find their latest expression in the call for a "neoliberalist" approach to development for Latin America (Sunkel 1993).

the society to actively confront the challenges of environmental management and conservation in a meaningful way, with a group of people uniquely qualified for such activities.⁷

Local autonomy is not new. Unlike the present version of the dual economy that permeates all our societies, confronting rich and poor, the proposal calls for creating new structures to permit those communities that *choose* to live in rural areas to receive support from the rest of the nation to implement an alternative regional development program. The new variant starts from the inherited base of rural production, improving productivity by using the techniques of agroecology. It also involves incorporating new activities that build on the cultural and resource base of the community and the region for further development. It requires very site specific responses to a general problem and therefore depends heavily on local involvement in design and implementation. While the broad outlines are widely discussed, the specifics require specific investment programs from direct producers and their partners. Our work with local communities in the over-wintering area of the Monarch Butterfly in west-central Mexico is one example of this approach to development.⁸

What is new is the introduction of an explicit strategy to strengthen the social and economic base for an autonomous production system. By recognizing and encouraging the marginal groups to create an alternative that would offer them better prospects for their own development, the approach suggested here might be mistaken to be the simple formalization of the "war on poverty" or "solidarity" approach to the alleviation of the worst effects of marginality. This would be an erroneous understanding, because the key to the proposal is not a simple transfer of resources to compensate groups for their poverty, but rather an integrated set of productive projects that offer rural communities the opportunity to generate goods and services that will contribute to raising their living standards while also improving the environment in which they live.

⁷Much of the literature on popular participation emphasizes the multifaceted contribution that the productive incorporation of marginal groups can make to society. (Friedmann 1992; Friedmann and Rangan 1993; Stiefel and Wolfe 1994) While very little has been done on specific strategies for sustainability in poor rural communities, it is clear that much of the experience recounted by practitioners with grassroots groups (e.g. Glade and Reilly 1993) is consistent with the principles enunciated by theorists and analysts like Altieri (1987).

⁸For the more general discussion, see Adelman 1984 and Barkin 1990, ch 7. FUNDE (1994) offers a specific program for the reconversion of El Salvador based on the principles discussed in Section 4 of this paper. The proposals of groups like the IAF and RIAD offer specific examples of ongoing grassroots efforts to implement initiatives like those discussed in the text. The Centro de Ecología y Desarrollo (Chapela and Barkin 1995) is sponsoring the reserach program of regional development consistent with the proposed strategy in the area of the Monarch Butterfly.

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