

Summary

What is the place of language in the design of development strategies satisfying global standards of sustainability as defined e.g. by the Rio conference in 1992 and maintained under the provision of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG)? An inquiry into this interdisciplinary *terra incognita* was carried out between July/October 2003 and December 2007 by researchers from the universities of Frankfurt, Kassel, Munster and Zurich in cooperation with scientific partners in Ivory Coast (Swiss Center of Scientific Research), Namibia (University of Namibia, Windhoek), Indonesia (Universitas Tadulako, Palu), and with various agencies engaged in local development. Communities participating in the research were the Tura (Ivory Coast), the Herero (Namibia), and populations indigenous to the periphery of the Lore Lindu Park in Central Sulawesi¹ - all sharing with a demographic majority south of the Sahara and in some other parts of the world a common condition of communicative dependency (CD): unequal distribution of language competences is typically matched by asymmetries of power and influence, which in conjunction with poverty constitute a self-reproducing cycle of marginalization of those players on whose shoulders rests a good deal of globally recognized objectives for sustainable development. Whereas CD downgrades potential actors to recipients of information, communicative sustainability (CS) enhances participation in decision-processes at all levels. Empowerment for negotiation, and inclusion for participation as prerequisites to sustainable development were shown to hinge to a much larger part than commonly assumed on linguistic factors, above all local language.

The different field locations and actor discourses provided the empirical basis for

- field-testing the core hypothesis underlying the research : *communicative sustainability* as a prerequisite to sustainability which in turn is a desired result of development;
- elaborating its methodological correlate : *local language hermeneutics*, a set of rules and guidelines for identifying and interpreting communicative sustainability indicators ;
- exploring its sociological and interactional dimension: *procedural infrastructure*, culturally determined sets of routines for collective deliberation and decision-making guaranteeing inclusion and social cohesion as prerequisites to locally recognized legitimacy.

As a factor contributing to sustainability, the role of local language can be defined :

1. as an epistemic tool for accessing and analyzing local analysis underlying local action;
2. as a factor of social cohesion, via language-governed exclusion or inclusion;
3. as a clearing place serving to mediate between expert and local knowledge ;
4. as the privileged instrument of implementing and monitoring local development;
5. as an object(ive) of development in its own right;
6. as a means of appropriation and marking ownership as a prerequisite to conservancy;
7. through writing, as a factor of strengthening local analytical capacities and redefining role attributions between languages in multilingual environments, as well as the role relationship between experts and actors.

These criteria provide a broadly applicable framework from which guidelines for defining and enhancing communicative factors influencing the outcome of development interventions can be established. It may be further submitted that heightened awareness of the language factor in development processes according to the findings of the project will lead to reducing mutual irrelevance between those participating in the development process, and thus will contribute to enhance uncontrived participation and thereby reduce transaction costs.

¹ The Baluli in Uganda were associated through displacement of a main researcher from war-torn Ivory Coast.

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