



# International Development's Hidden Agenda: Towards a Latent Modernization of "Traditional" Societies

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Received 27 August 2014; revised 4 October 2014; accepted 5 November 2014

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## Abstract

**This paper examines the existence of a hidden agenda in international development *i.e.* a group of latent ideas to promote social change in "traditional" societies. The arguments to support and analyse this proposal come from empirical work during several years and places, with special emphasis in Colombian ethnic minorities who receive aid from European agencies. This main idea focuses in three areas that are the part of the development projects: gender equality, environmental awareness and economic rationality. The transmission of a hidden agenda does not correspond to any explicit intention of the foreign aid actors, but to the empowerment of modern logic as the only possible way to establish "adequate" social changes.**

## Keywords

**Colombia, Hidden Agenda, Development, Modern Society, "Traditional" Society**

**Subject Areas: Development Economics, Sociology**

## 1. Introduction

Non-governmental organizations (NGO) and international development agencies usually land in remote areas of non-industrialized countries implementing projects in different fields from socio-cultural to economics with the issue of developing and improving the live conditions of the people. However, in many circumstances, these interventions contradict traditional cultural patterns and traditional ways of doing things by certain social and ethnic groups.

These projects participated of a hidden agenda that is showing unconscious actions and behaviours from NGO workers from industrialized countries and urban contexts. We use the term "hidden agenda" because it allows us

**How to cite this paper:** Gómez-Quintero, J.D., Marcuello-Servós, C. and Huedo, M.L.S. (2014) International Development's Hidden Agenda: Towards a Latent Modernization of "Traditional" Societies. *Open Access Library Journal*, 1: e870.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1100870>

to clarify some intentions and objectives of international development. Some authors like Sachs affirm that “the hidden agenda in development it was only the westernization of the world” [1]. In a certain way, it is an old approach.

There are many authors who have studied hidden intentions in social action or social justice for example the works of Ivan Illich [2] and Bell Hooks [3] about a hidden curriculum, or Robert Merton’s theory about the latent functions [4] as well as Linda Tuhiwai Smith [5]. These reflect an invisible dimension in transforming or keeping the given or established social order.

Moreover, the term “hidden agenda” has different connotations and references. “Hidden agenda” is a famous and relevant computer game created in the 1980s, where the player take the role of a leader of a post-revolutionary government in late 20th century Latin America, as president of Chimerica, a fictitious country. “Hidden agenda” is political thriller filmed in 1990 and directed by Ken Loach. Following Dennis Smith [6] the globalization has a “hidden agenda”. And “hidden agenda”, according to Denis Goulet and Michael Hudson [7] is a part of the myth of aid and the development reports.

Nevertheless, the main objective of this article is to show that there is a hidden agenda in development transferring a set of practices and social norms that are set around a modern *Weltanschauung*, (cosmovision). We conceive cosmovision as the set of images that a society or culture has on the real world in a period of time. For Lander [8] the modern view of the world is the naturalization of social relations that come from the conception of social life from the modern and liberal society. This is why the majority of development agents understand that rationalization of life, individualism or even the modern conception of time are timeless universal values and they are very important for “underdeveloped” or non-industrialized societies in order to become industrialized or “developed”.

Sociologists like Sztompka [9], Rist [10] and Latour [11] consider the development of non-industrialized societies as a way for copying the model of Western societies. In other words, for them modernization of “traditional” societies is the same as westernization.

We show that some procedures used in international development, promoting social change in “traditional societies” or communities, have a hidden agenda. This is not an evil intention in order for western societies to introduce certain topics or practices. However, they are aspects of social modern life or patterns that due to their importance and value are indirectly transmitted to other people who do not share the same Cosmovision.

## 2. Method and Context

We posit that there are different hidden agendas in international development, but they have a common pattern: they are a set of beliefs and latent practices transmitted by development workers that set up objectives and establish procedures that come from Western societies. Usually strategic plans are developed wherever the funds come from, setting general objectives by the West and never or some times partially taking into account the main beneficiaries of the projects (Marcuello y Marcuello) [12].

This statement is the result of the outcomes of our studies, doing in different countries and periods. We started in the 1990s in Central America. However, here, we will focus in years 2006 to 2008 considering a particular case between Spain and Colombia. We used an inductive qualitative approach. The methods used were (22) semi structure interviews with open-ended questions, to a purposeful sample of different development workers and participatory action research. Half of the selected NGOs were from Aragon, Spain and the other half were their counterparts in different Departments in Colombia<sup>1</sup>. Qualitative research was the most indicated one for this type of study since we wanted to know the perceptions, thoughts and impressions of development workers, who are implementing projects in Colombia.

At first, Aragonese organizations, which have had presence in Colombia, were selected for the study. Aragon has international, national and local agencies that run and manage all range of budgets and programs. This is why with the selected Aragonese NGOs sample would still be valid and it would represent all type of organiza-

<sup>1</sup>Aragonese NGOs: 1) Seminario de Investigación para la Paz. 2) Fundación Juan Bonal. 3) Comité Cristiano Óscar Romero. 4) Entreculturas (Fe y Alegría). 5) Médicos del Mundo. 6) Coordinadora CASCOL. 7) Comité de Solidaridad Internacionalista. 8) InteRed. 9) AMAT. 10) Acción Solidaria Aragonesa. 11) Proclade. To find it: [www.aragonsolidario.org/](http://www.aragonsolidario.org/)

Colombian NGOs Counterpart: 1) COCOMACIA, Quibdó. 2) Diócesis de Quibdó. 3) Fe y Alegría Colombia, Bogotá. 4) UNICEF Colombia, Bogotá. 5) Escuela Nacional Sindical, Medellín. 6) Fundación Jaidé. 7) Red de Mujeres del Chocó, Quibdó. 8) Federación Chocoana de ONGs, Quibdó. 9) CorporaciónREGION, Medellín. 10) Confederación Colombiana de ONG. 11) Codesarrollo, Medellín. To find it: [www.ccong.org.co](http://www.ccong.org.co)

tions.

According to the *Plan Director of Spanish Development 2005-2008* from now on (MAE) [13] the two first topics mentioned above are transversal to all Spanish Development Projects funded by the Spanish Agency of International Development and Cooperation, (AECID). The third topic mentioned above, tries to unfold a set of practices and meanings that are under the strategy of financing development projects in order to support economic initiatives like micro credits and fair trade.

There are many anthropologists (Viola [14]; Bretón, [15]; Gimeno y Monreal, [16]; Picas, [17]) and sociologists (Serbin, [18]; López y Uldemolins, [19]) who have been criticizing Spanish international development projects, mainly because of the direct consequences of great socio-cultural changes imposed to the beneficiaries of those projects: “usually (agencies) have defined agendas that are ‘exported’ to the South, prioritizing global issues that are not always found in the cognitive horizon and the local demands” (Serbin [18]: 72).

L. T. Smith [5], when talking about post colonialism, says: “This is best articulated by Aborigine activist Bobbi Sykes, who asked at an academic conference on post-colonialism, ‘What? Post-colonialism? Have they left?’ (1999: 24).

However, we do not want to focus on the political or economic side of the external and unilateral definition of the development agendas. We focus on the hidden processes by which certain values and social conquests of modern societies are transferred to non-industrialised societies. This means an identification of a direct symbolic aggression of certain processes promoting social change in peripheral societies. We should take into account and reflect for a moment, how long western civic society has taken to change, in topics like gender equity or environmental awareness. All of a sudden, these long-term fights from the West, are moved, in a very mechanic way and out of context to development projects and need to be implemented in “traditional” societies.

Such social conquests are the result of historical processes that could be located and placed in a certain time, like the twentieth century, in a certain space, western democracies, and with certain actors, social movements and political parties among others. That questions the supposed universalism and timeless condition of certain causes when these get to certain non-industrialized countries. However, it seems that Western countries urge the implementation of these topics in their development projects.

Such agendas in development programs and projects aim to transform certain discriminatory/oppressive situations, which violate basic Human Rights in traditional communities. At the same time, the latent dimension of international development agendas through certain practices and procedures are contradicting some objectives and principles that motivate the defence of those objectives. This in Human Rights has been called Universalism vs. Particularism.

The following areas will drive to show the existence of a hidden agenda in international development: 1) Promotion of top-down practices in gender equality; 2) Environmental awareness among indigenous populations; 3) Transferring a western economic rationalism. We select those analysis categories because it are transversal to most of the projects of international development cooperation.

### 3. Promotion of Top-Down Practices in Gender Equality

We don’t discuss the value of certain development agencies general objectives, like gender equality. We show that top-down decision making, which is normally used in fieldwork, is not the most appropriate for the success of development projects. Grassroots development has long time ago, proved its success and impact in many projects. We see unfair the way certain funding agencies (donors) have made compulsory that gender equality had to be present in the projects they fund. Where do the logic framework methodology and all those grassroots and bottom up international development practices stand under this funding pressure? Recipient’s perception is similar to this opinion: “*agencies from the Netherlands or from the European Union have established that: Project that does not have gender equality as an objective has less chances*” (CI-01)<sup>2</sup>.

We could observe that these kind of compulsory transversal topics and practices are reproducing top-down, unidirectional gender relations that have already been criticised. It could not be denied that the presence of gender equality topics as a part of programs and projects funded by International and National Development Agencies is a must in order to get them funded and that, in a way it comes from larger strategic plans. As Stromquist [20] affirms, those strategic actions identified in the Platform for Action in Beijing 1995, include among some

<sup>2</sup>The code CI-## means Colombian Interview and the number is the chronological order of interview. The code SI-## means Spanish Interview and the number is the chronological order.

“Encourage consciousness-raising of girls” and “Train women in self-reliance and leadership”.

However, this is understood by NGOs that gender equality must be included in their projects in order to obtain funds. Hernández and Suárez [21] affirm that western feminist movements, “speaks from a powerful structure and it has been able to impose a political agenda as the only valid agenda to build gender equity”. Although, to define Western feminism<sup>3</sup> is such an extended topic that another article could be written about it.

One of the interviewees, who is a leader of a women’s group from Chocó<sup>4</sup>, when talking about support from development agencies and States, she made obvious that in certain cases these funding agencies are more concerned and worried about the diagnose and implementation than local communities and organizations: “*Red de Mujeres del Chocó (Women’s Group of Chocó) is funded by the Canadian Gender Fund, because they want to establish gender equity culture in all the projects that are being implemented here and to improve women participation in politics and also educate them so they can participate in the strengthening of civic empowerment*” (CI-02).

When she refers to “they”, she is implying that gender equality is probably not an implicit objective coming from the beneficiaries or local communities. This is, maybe, because there is no identification with gender inequalities, or maybe that gender equality in Canada has certain social, cultural implications, different to what might be understood in Chocó, Colombia as gender equality.

The interviewee refers as “them” when talking about gender equality and the interest to promote equity, as if it was coming from outsiders and not from within local communities. This does not show a total disagreement between local communities and donors, but it does show that the defended arguments about change and real development that should follow a bottom-up process are in this case not being followed.

Barrig [22] in a study with indigenous women from Cuzco observed that the implementation of gender equality actions from projects was done in a very forced way. She also clarified that this was done like that, because the identification of the factors that originated the problem would have come from outside funding agencies.

Under that point of view, this is then a forced implementation of artificial gender equality that results in one community being the outcome of the sum of single human being that could be classified in two types, according to their gender. This forgets the existence of community attachments, that are strongly merged and which representations transcend the idea of individualism. These autonomous individual human beings are conceptions that are not understood in collective societies ([22]: 83).

Moreover, in Central America, Waterman [23] analyzed how a value import process is directly related to sustainability and gender programs funded by International Agencies. This can be understood in a similar way as in how there was a value import process during the missions during colonization. Waterman affirms that values, such as personal hygiene, were imposed by white colonizers. This for example is still reflected in how indigenous women from Guatemala prefer to deliver their babies at home than going to hospitals. This is mainly because at the hospital they are forced to take cold showers while in their culture the ritual is to go to the Mayan sauna after giving birth.

As Waterman [23] and Barrig [22] have stated, the type of language used by International Development Agencies in topics such as gender it might mean a way to guarantee funds. However, this kind of language, in many occasions empty (technocrat), may hide certain type of relations that continue on the margins of the projects.

The meaning of gender therefore should be considered in relation to cultural contexts. The same as some modern feminism has ended up being identified with certain male behavioural pattern. Post-modern feminism (Lazreg, [24]; Parpart, [25]) denounces that European feminism tradition has ended up demanding liberation of “Third World” women, the same way as Western women. A Spanish development worker, who has worked with indigenous women in Colombia, mentioned that the vision or perception of her European condition in the Embera indigenous community had originated high expectations among women, in order for her to play a male role: “*When I go to the Local Govern or Town Hall, they open the doors for me, it would be very difficult to do my job if I was Colombian. To be a foreigner for the group, for my work represents a plus [...] in the community I play my male role because I walk up front like men do*” (CI-09).

<sup>3</sup>When we use the term western feminism, we refer to the main modern feminist theories, which include liberal feminism, socialist feminism and radical feminism.

<sup>4</sup>It is the poorest department in Colombia. Located in the West, between Department of Antioquia (coffee area with a major industrial and service sector, the capital is Medellín) and Pacific Ocean. Its population is mostly African descent, with the presence of some indigenous groups.

If we look at the definition of equality, it is a process a change of norms, values, attitudes and perceptions needed in order to reach certain status. According to this definition, when certain projects are about establishing equity or introducing gender perspectives, they might sound paradoxical. This process empowers the beneficiaries, changing power relations in people who before had little authority over their own lives (Sen) [26]. This shows an uneven interaction, where an organization establishes certain cultural values and perspectives financing projects and giving specific technical support to those projects. Creating a new culture, this could be questioned mainly because it might be seen as a colonizing culture or as trying to impose new behavioural patterns perceived or understood as the ones coming from the colonizers.

Gender is considered transversal to reach an objective in the development world. However, there are certain factors that are directly attached to gender that have not been taken into account like ethnicity, identity and territory. It is believed that women's liberation is only possible copying the same processes and attitudes that western women have gone through (Shiva, [27]; Escobar, [28]; Gimeno&Monreal, [16]; Mohanty, [29]; Parpart, [25] and Barrig, [22]).

Butler allows us to open our minds to the possibility that maybe the abstract idea of gender does not exist, meaning that gender is connected to a wide group of characteristics: "class, ethnic, sexual and regional identities constructed in the discourse" (Butler [30]: 34-35).

We ask if deep inside this universal extension of gender equality is related to an extension of capitalism. The latter pretends to set free those subjects attached to tradition and culture, in order to incorporate them into the market world. Castro-Gómez [31] has explained how modern development has also consisted on the proletarianizing of those communities that somehow were resilient to capitalism.

This hidden agenda suggests that being docile and accepting certain imposed equality patterns can be seen as the same previously imposed patriarchal patterns. Imposing even though are certain gender equality patterns, is at the end an imposition and therefore an obligation. There are many Western feminists who practice a moral discourse over poor and illiterate women from the South, which remind us to the similar patriarchal authority that the first ones got rid of in the first place. It is a way of looking to indigenous communities with superiority.

Western feminism has been close to secularization and individualism. They claim the rationalization of the female body and about a moral that subjugated and constrained the female body. However, many authors (Hooks [3]; F. Mernissi, [32]; S. Mahmood, [33]) explain how the existence of a Western hegemonic feminism has limited the possibilities of other feminist expressions. They have specified the colonial and imperial character of certain feminisms. Although the African or Muslim feminisms are not looking for that secularization or individualism but for a change in roles and spaces related with women and religion, or a change of roles related with women and power, and women and freedom.

In Latin America, it is interesting to see how feminist groups relate to family and the community like they do women indigenous groups from the Andes (Rivera) [34]. The same way it is important to mention the great effort that Chicano feminist have done in order to defend their identity like Anzaldúa [35].

On the hidden agenda about gender issues there are great efforts towards building gender equality, reproducing the same one as in the West with the implementation of concepts like liberalism, secularization, rationalism and individualism. These do not take into account the expressions of women who live in the periphery. This focuses on women from non-industrialized countries like passive participants of social transformations, missing their own heroic efforts towards building other ways of gender equality. We see those women, who some of them lack economic resources and education, as active agents not as passive participants, and they (as it can be seen in all the interviews) are against copying and reproducing Western patriarchal "progressive" cultural patterns. Those voices need an opportunity to be heard and respected.

#### 4. The Environmental Question: Teaching Indigenous Populations?

Another transversal topic in international development projects is respect for the environment. In the recent past years there has been an important increase in the number of international environmental NGOs working in Chocó, Colombia, where there is a major interest in preserving the rapidly degradation of the Darién Forest<sup>5</sup>. We are referring here to certain international NGOs that only work with specific international organizations, which

<sup>5</sup>Located in Northern Chocó next to Panama. It is one of the regions with more moisture and biodiversity per square kilometre in the world. Its existence "prevents" the end of the Pan-American highway that communicates by land to Central and North America with the southern continent. Hence, this area is called "the Darien Gap".

focus on environment.

According to certain interviewees working in the Chocó Region there is a well-known preference for NGOs and International Agencies specialised in environmental projects. According to the NGO Federation from Chocó (Fedechocó), these NGOs and agencies are the ones receiving larger international amount of funds. This could be understood due to the value of the Darién Forest, which is mainly located in the Chocó Region, this is one of the world largest ecological reserves. What worries Fedechocó is that it seems to be an occasional interest and that in a couple of years it might be transferred to another part of the world, or the funds might be relocated to another project or area more important then. This sudden and excessive interest for the environment coincides with political or scientific criteria external to the local communities, the same as what happens with gender equality projects.

The increasing interest in the protection of the Darién Rain Forest could be understood in more than one way. This rain forest is not protected because there are people who have been living there over 500 years and they could directly suffer from its own environment destruction, but because it is seen as a national representation, patriotic symbol and because it has a great potential of tourism.

It seems paradoxical that in recent years there have been environmental projects which main objective is to train indigenous communities how to take care of their natural resources, in where they have been living over centuries: “*It is still supposed that the benevolent Western (white) hand will save the Earth. [...] God forbids that a Peruvian farmer, an African nomad or a rubber worker from the Amazon would have something to say on that matter*” (Escobar [28]: 365).

One of the last trends in higher education in Colombia is to give scholarships to indigenous people to study graduate programs (Master Degree) in sustainable development. We found out while doing field work in Medellín, Colombia, when we had the opportunity to get to know a group of indigenous graduate students from Putumayo, a region in the Colombian Rain Forest, who were studying a master’s degree in development<sup>6</sup>. Once they graduate they have easier access to funds in order to develop sustainable development projects in their rural communities. This could be developed into a further study about what the real intentions are with this kind of program. Are they training in sustainable development that respects, protects and preserves indigenous communities? Or are they training in a sustainable development that protects Western interests in indigenous communities?

It is interesting that indigenous communities are seen as prospect students to learn how to preserve and how to take care of their own natural environment. There is a tendency to think that the “Knowledge” that comes from the West is superior to the traditional knowledge (Giddens [36]; Marcuse [37]). This is mainly seen when the western development worker or since expert travels to rural communities to explain how the beneficiaries of the projects should develop the projects in order for these ones to be more sustainable. The projects explained are not only related to environment, they are about cultural patterns and about their bodies as well. When western development workers reject local knowledge, they show little awareness and consideration towards rural communities with whom they work with. According to Latour [11], it is the modern human being who absorbs the society and nature and tries to control them through economic and scientific production. After so many years promoting one kind of development that broke the close relationship between traditional human beings and Nature, it would be the current human being the one called to rebuild that relationship.

It is interesting to see how contradictory they seem the efforts made by foundations, multilateral organizations and NGOs in order to recompose the fractured relationship between society and nature. They focus all their energies on teaching ecological agriculture, naturally breeding their children and even the protection of biodiversity. All is made trying to protect traditional communities. However, on the first place those traditional communities changed certain patterns of behaviour some time ago when the first development projects and the first funding got to the remote areas where they live, believing then that the West had the key for a better and more “developed” way of life. As for example it happened when breastfeeding was thought not to be good for the mother nor the children or even when it was questioned the way indigenous mothers carry their babies wrapped on their backs or on their chests. However, these agencies do not concentrate on denouncing the violation of collective rights to public entities and businesses that instead of promoting development have tried to promote extensive agriculture, building great infrastructures and the commercialization of certain type of food and certain

<sup>6</sup>Some universities in Colombia, the Ministry of Culture and other organizations such as the Fulbright Commission offer grants for indigenous and Afro-Colombians who wish to take graduate courses in Colombia and the United States. Some areas of expertise are education, development, environment and culture. [www.fulbright.edu.co](http://www.fulbright.edu.co) [on line] 31 January 2008.

pharmaceutical products. There are chapters in the history of the origins and development of agricultural afro-descendants organizations that have gone through a consciousness process of the risks of this kind of development (COCOMACIA y Red de Solidaridad social, [38]: 113).

During the 1990-decade sustainable development, ecological agriculture and ecotourism changed the previous expansive development model. These new trends might have two important problems. On the one hand, the rapid implementation of the prefix eco- and the adjective sustainable, is trying to minimize the progressive invalidity of other expressions such as “exploitation of natural resources”. On the other hand, there are some governmental programs and private programs that are hiring local tourist guides and forest guarding families<sup>7</sup> are placing on the farmers and natives the last responsibility of taking care of their natural environment. It seems that with the externalization of the environmental responsibility of farmers and indigenous people, the so called third generation rights (also called environmental rights) would be inhabitants’ responsibility and not big companies’ responsibility which have over the years claimed modernization and development.

As a matter of fact, “*the most successful NGO in Chocó is Asociación Ecológica del Chocó (Ecological Association from Chocó)*” (CI-02), this is mainly due to all the funds that they got from international agencies. We see this as what happened with gender equality, an external transmission understood in a different way by local people. We do not want to affirm that local people do not value environmental issues, but they perceive their needs and problems in a different way. Agencies and NGOs from the “Northern” value it in a traditional and conservative way, as if they were trying to save the lost treasure: “*At the Federation of NGOs I have three NGOs focusing on environment and they all receive funds from international NGOs, Chocó is a world ecological reservation and there are many agencies and NGOs that are interested in helping to protect and preserve this rain forest*” (CI-02).

Communities of Afro descendants would mainly want to be autonomous, so they can decide what to do with their collective land. The background of their organizations, especially Peasant Association from Atrato River is related with the defence of their territory against wood companies and also against the lack of knowledge of their government, which during the sixties applied the term “national waste lands” to those territories. As we have mentioned before, we believe that following grass roots development methodologies in order to implement environmental projects would help to protect those indigenous communities and the areas where they live.

## 5. Understanding Bureaucratic and Economic Rationalization

It is generally known that a very common international development technique is funding development projects through local NGOs as counterparts. These implicit practices are interrelated and based on public funding, non-refunding loans and micro credits. They teach and transmit an economic model (competitive in order to get certain public funding for certain projects, justify expenses and a closed accounting system), this implies that traditional groups of people accept those modern practices mentioned above.

It can be very difficult to give financial support to development projects that promote traditional economical systems or even cultural preservation of certain minorities. As for example the justification of expenses in a traditional business project (productive practice inherited by their ancestors) with bills, tickets and receipts. This implies the imposition of a Western model, reducing and limiting traditional economical practices of many indigenous cultures. The negative side effects might be reflected in two very different attitudes among the communities benefiting from these projects: one predictable attitude that satisfies the funding institution with an expected outcome and a “correct behaviour”, and a second one which keeps their traditional ways of developing projects as they believe they should be done and justified.

We would also like to comment the conception of time. Development projects implemented by international agencies or funded by international agencies or NGOs imply a time conception that understands prediction, planning and evaluation procedures. This is a big change in a traditional conception of time and also in farming periods, as well as seasonal and community times (Fägerlind & Saha) [39].

According to Kottak [40] [41] and Hurtado [42] there is a great disparity in timing mainly between beneficiaries of development projects, as well as the tensions that occur when a rationalized time frame is imposed to chronological cultures. As a Spanish development worker in Colombia states: “*Sometimes they say—‘if you do not do the activities in certain dates, we won’t fund them’, then, before having the house, we have to buy every-*

<sup>7</sup>National Development Plan submitted by the administration of President Uribe (2002-2006) entitled “Towards a Communitarian State” included the creation of ranger’s families who took positions of responsibility and monitoring their environment.

*thing in order not to loose all those funds, therefore it is not the regular rhythm of implementation that the project normally follows” (SI-04).*

Everyone who has worked for an international NGO or agency doing fieldwork knows that this situation is common. This as well as regional interest for funding has been a stressful moment for more than one development worker in the field. Another important latent transformation is the commercialization of the development work done with the communities. When you work with rural communities implementing a project, after the participatory rapid appraisal, the community and the beneficiaries agree to collaborate in certain aspects of its implementation. This agreement is done according to the project and to the possibilities of the beneficiaries. However, different NGOs have different procedures about this aspect and there are some communities that have been overwhelmed with projects, because they are located in priority intervention areas, spoiling this tacit collaboration agreement. A volunteer (SI-09) for an organization explains how the access to more funds by different organizations weakened the strings of mechanic solidarity, and the beneficiaries started to ask for salaries. These exchanges of favours practices usually change when international agencies arrive to rural communities and start paying for services that were seen before as a favour. There are different ways of viewing the solidarity from the communities. Once big organizations start to pay for certain services that previously were free, it changes behavioural patterns in rural communities. Once this starts it is very difficult to go back, and then all NGOs are forced to pay. The chain of favours is broken and Western behavioural patterns imposed and accepted by traditional and rural communities.

This process could be seen as a modern version of the expansion of capitalism. A thesis already mentioned above, is that international development with their projects, unconsciously transmits a modern liberal society model as the only possible one. There are different options called “alternative economy” or “alternative productivity”, even though most of the time the alternative is not new, it is only an effort to keep traditional production patterns. These patterns do not necessarily generate more products to accumulate capital neither have a centralised production or distribution. Fair trade projects and micro credits are a good example of this. These initiatives might be seen as a soft version of capitalism, trying to be fair when distributing benefits (Tandon [43]: 59).

However, many communities are asking for their right to have an economy based on their basic needs, even though this demand challenges the rationalization of capitalism. Many economic development programs have been focused on improving farming techniques in order to make the production more efficient, and increasing their capital. These programs assume that the beneficiaries want to accumulate capital as a based of their growth and development, not taken into account their own conceptions of value, their relationships facing production and their efforts to keep away from capitalism. These assumptions of many agencies and NGOs reaffirm the existence of an international development hidden agenda that transmits unconscious practices as universal and valid ones.

The solution for many communities is to go back to a subsistence economy, self-sufficient and autonomous (Shiva) [27]. This model proposes the creation of societies based on decentralised and self-sustainable economies, producing for regional needs with their own resources, in a way that protects nature and human-beings in their social relationships. There are some actors from the civil society who show great resistance to this initiative. The consequences of being incorporated to the productive system of the capitalist world system could be worse than being kept in their subsistence economy (Kottak [40]: 307).

Some recent works in Anthropology and Development have analysed social and cultural impact of implementing certain production practices in the traditional communities. Far away from uniformity, each culture organizes differently its own ways of producing and creates its own universe of symbols. That way, what Western hegemonic discourse considers natural, to others it might not only be anti-natural, but alienating even malicious. There are rural societies in which the economic activity is in the structure of their rights and obligations, therefore to start being part of the market creates important distortions among social networks and value systems (Picas Contreras) [17].

Lets take the specific case of the collective lands in Chocó, Colombia, where it has been observed how property models based on non-rationalized elements like family relations, have started breaking, when commercial partnerships and new economic partnerships arrived there. In order to sell or buy some land in those collective lands you mainly need family relationships and the approval of the nearby land owners (COCOMACIA and Red de Solidaridad Social, [38]: 237). These models guarantee the group cohesion and the maintenance of the family structure through the production of smallholdings. One of the main fights of the Major Community Council of the Integral Farmers from Atrato (COCOMACIA) has been trying to avoid the division of those ties and the



weakened of their structures mainly promoted by private enterprises and the tenant farmers (settlers) from Antioquia (people of mixed race from a neighbouring and richer department) independent who have a liberal conception about property and the use of the lands.

In the North of the Cauca Valley, something similar happens with the Embera indigenous communities. These communities are trying to strengthen their collective identities in order to avoid the selling of their lands. However, they are facing great difficulties because they are being pressured to sell the lands that they have owned forever, neither from national private enterprises nor international ones, neither from settlers, but from drug trafficking. According to the words of an interviewee, the drugs cartels from the Northern part of the valley, “*they get into the communities saying what they have to do, what they have to plant in order to make a lot of money, and this generates social disintegration, [...] many destabilizing elements at the community level*” (CI-08).

Nowadays, the techniques used to get not proletarian social groups to develop alternative market practices are more progressive and innovative. However, sometimes socializing fair trade practices among indigenous communities implies some kind of alternative proletarianization, although those are fairer with their benefits than the international free market ones. There are NGOs that have trained those indigenous communities in western international clothes sizes and how to sell their traditional products in international markets, as an economic alternative.

In 2004 the Colombian Environment Ministry broadcasted a program called green markets in which they supported the creation and development of enterprises founded by indigenous peoples. These enterprises had to follow certain requirements, their products needed to have their own coffee brand<sup>8</sup>, this program was supported by The Netherlands Embassy, the Tayrona Indigenous Confederation, the organization representing the indigenous community Arhuaco<sup>9</sup> and Carrefour. It is interesting to see the diversity of the participants of this program, this could mean the commitment of all organizations to ease the introduction of indigenous’ products in the international market, through conventional or alternative distribution networks. However, those channels were supposed to follow fair trade patterns, which ironically are part of the international French chain Carrefour. Finally, Tiwun was the chosen name for this coffee brand. This indigenous name is used to get the attention of buyers, and it is sold as an ecological/organic product, “this product is cultivated in Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta with sustainable methods that have allowed it to be certified as ‘organic product’ by the French firm Eco-Cert” (El Tiempo Newspaper, Bogotá, 2 October 2004).

We have not access to sufficient data to affirm that the situation of the Arhuacos would be more vulnerable if they were not part of these productive/market systems, we are not judging the results but the possible consequences of those procedures. National and international organizations start including to the economic globalization, groups that have been away from it and the effects that this might have in the social relations influenced by capitalism and commerce. If social cohesion of certain groups of people is based in identity, tradition or relation with the land, we ask ourselves what will be the effects, if capitalist market relations substitute them.

A direct consequence of this is that certain ethnic groups, when being part of international development projects, are implementing new practices based in competitiveness, efficiency and efficacy of their resources. This resembles the McDonalization process by Ritzer [44] by which efficacy criteria, calculus, prediction and control are universalised over all social life dimensions.

This is very much related with the own logic of subsidies, which implies practices from the main spirit of capitalism. Generally a development agency allows some part of their budget to promote and implement an alternative economic project, but the administrative procedures to get those funds force the communities to know and control terms and practices already mentioned. The competitive process to access those subsidies and funds makes rural communities to change their behavioural and cultural patterns. This is why the efforts that those communities do in order to implement and develop alternative economic projects would be, by all means, a cultural mask, or a productive simile that will make those who have funded the projects happy. This will also increase their dependency on external funds, which we all know would not be there forever.

We see here again the existence of a hidden agenda in the international development world. In order to get the economic resources that finance an alternative productive project, certain specific skills are needed; those come from a traditional economy. This way procedures introduced by international development projects transform

<sup>8</sup>“*Indígenas Arhuacos lanzan su propia marca de café*”. (Arhuacos Indigenous offers their brand of coffee). Gustavo León Ramírez Ospina, Medellín. *El Tiempo* Newspaper, Bogotá, 2 October 2004.

<sup>9</sup>The Arhuacos are an indigenous community of 22,000 people living in the Sierra Nevada of Santa Marta on the Caribbean coast of Colombia.

traditional procedures and practices even without knowing, from those communities that they try to develop. For example, one of the organizations that work with the Embera (an indigenous group), train community members in planning their expenses and in financial management of the funds that they are granted with (CI-08). This support through training is important as part of technical help, although it is also crucial to be conscious that these NGOs are socializing these indigenous communities in modern rationalised bureaucracy. Being conscious about those matters make us clearly see how certain practices are preserved, although indigenous communities are trained in other practices that are considered a must. It seems that all indicators point to modernity, or at least what the West considers modern.

## 6. Conclusions

We have not tried to suggest a lack of activity in the actions of international development when facing the immediate obvious social transformation induced. It would be interesting for people who work in international development to think about how certain strategic areas of intervention are proposed and implemented.

How do certain priorities get to be to try to avoid the top-down implementation process and to establish a bottom-up implementation decision process? When we talk about grassroots development, a key part is to listen to and try to understand what indigenous communities are saying and why they are saying it. Important social transformations in Europe and in United States of America during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were long and difficult processes of consciousness, mobilization and social recognitions. Therefore, we cannot pretend an immediate transformation.

In a similar way, plenty of the objectives of Latin American societies correspond to their own cultural values, norms and traditions. This is why it is important to know, listen and dialogue international development agendas without assuming the legitimacy and universality of certain objectives and goals. Development projects should be a two-way road, where consensus is a crucial part of the final decision. We should take into account that no matter what beneficiaries are the ones who would live there generation after generation, we as development workers or researchers will leave the area sooner than their traditions.

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