

## **Communicative Sustainability and Environmental Sustainability**

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The paper reports about the preliminary results of the Research Project “Language, Gender and Sustainability” (funded by Volkswagen-Stiftung). Four cases of development projects in the fields of agricultural development and natural resource management among linguistic / ethnic minorities in four countries (the Baluli in Uganda, the Toura in Ivory Coast, the Herero in Namibia, and the Kaili / Pekurehura in Indonesia) have been studied from a sociological and linguistic perspective, with a particular focus on the role of local language hermeneutics for communicative sustainability by a team of five field researchers. Observation with methods of discourse analysis and methods of network analysis was focused on the processes through which new ideas become a normal part in the local discourse – how they become rooted in the local discourse through institutionalization and linkage to distinctly local systems of meaning embedded in local languages.

The concept of communicative sustainability refers to a precondition of the sustainability of effects of development projects: only when the local discourse takes up innovative ideas brought through development interventions will they become sustainable beyond the termination of the external intervention. In the face of population growth this is particularly important for the ideas of sustainable resource management as one of the aspects of sustainable development: otherwise, a depletion of the natural resource base will threaten the sustainability of livelihoods strategies of future rural generations.

The project’s practical contribution are the communicative sustainability indicators developed. They concern a) the overlap in meaning between innovative ideas and local language concepts, b) the local language as an expression of distinct local identities, respect for which releases emotional energies for development efforts in the field of community based natural resources management, and c) local institutions and forms of organization.

The latter refer to concepts of leadership on one hand, and to the management of natural resources on the other. One of the surprising results of this investigation is the similarity in the characterizations of “good leadership” in all research areas: both local leaders and their constituencies agree that one of the most important characteristics of a good leader is his ability to listen and to understand local problems – and then to act as a mediator to government or outside agencies who are expected to contribute to their solution.

One of the problems which is acknowledged in varying degrees is the dearth of natural resources needed for sustainable livelihoods. This is expressed in terms of poverty – which forces people to use resources beyond recognized limits and despite observing negative environmental effects, such as overfishing in Lake Kyoga in Uganda, floods, erosion, and disappearance of species in the vicinity of the newly created Lore Lindu National Park in Indonesia, deterioration of grazing in the communal Omatjete area in Namibia, and destruction of oil palm groves in Ivory Coast. The sustainability of

livelihood strategies would require active “good” leadership in managing the use of these resources, while in practice local leaders are often expected to condone transgressions of sustainable –i.e. long-term – solutions.