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## **CULTURE, COMMUNITY AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

There are several models that have historically been used in the pursuit of economic development in the Third World. For the most part, economic development programs were typically understood in a narrow, compartmentalized sense. Issues such as affordable housing, educational resources and even health care, are often seen as programs separate and apart from what is considered to be economic development. This approach has resulted in many known development failures. The evidence is that programs that focus separately in one or the other aspect of overall development will likely not be sustainable in the longer run. There can be no sustainable economic development without adequate affordable housing, and there can be no affordable housing without physical resources that insure the health and safety of the community's ecological settings. As a result, we must devise creative, economically feasible and implementable models that pursue economic development programs in a more organic and comprehensive fashion. At the same time we must face the fact that creative economic development approaches face stiff competition from two of the most salient historical bi-products of colonialism: the belief in the nation-state as the only, or the best suited tool for society's overall welfare, and the belief that local and native cultures are mostly obstacles to be overcome, or psychological barriers that must be overturned in the name of progress. Nothing is more contrary to the evidence on the ground. The evidence is that in order to pursue sustainable economic development programs, we must agree to focus not only on centralized state-approaches, but also direct our attention to regional, local and community-based projects. It is important to note that community-based projects, in order to succeed, must be professionally planned and executed. It is also very important to establish, that not only community-based projects are adequate tools for economic development, but that the preservation and enhancement of community life is a value unto itself. When considering regional development projects from a national perspective, successful local projects can be replicated and spread geographically to encompass increasingly larger areas of the national territory. We should learn to take advantage of the fact that at the local and regional levels it is much more feasible to plan and implement development programs with an organic outlook, that is, economic projects where housing, education and health care come together as different aspects of the same overall economic project. At the same time, we must thoroughly re-assess local cultures as the eminently powerful tools for economic development that they are. We must re-establish local cultures as a resource for development, not as a drawback, and view the ecological settings as a resource that serves economic development best when it is preserved and protected. Community, culture, and ecology are the most creative and feasible tools for immediate and sustainable community development.