

## Some Considerations on the Limits of Anthropological Theory as Applied to Community Development

**Abstract.** — *The anthropologist wishing to participate in development planning is faced with a dilemma. The majority of applied research has portrayed a classical, functionalist perspective wherein development is viewed essentially as a cultural problem of the small, self-contained community. Ideals of "cultural relativism" have relegated considerations on extra-local economic and political phenomena to the realm of personal ethics. Whereas general anthropology theory has evolved well beyond this approach in past years, the problem is that there has been little interest in investigating ways to apply the new theoretical perspectives to practical problems of development. In this article, an attempt is made to combine macro- and micro-level analyses in a study which reveals ethical and operational factors intertwining around conflicting interests. The author does not pretend to offer a solution for the pure/applied sciences dichotomy, but rather to broaden debate by analyzing her frustrations during a year's experience as consulting anthropologist in an international project promoting women's education in Upper Volta, West Africa. [West Africa, Applied Anthropology, Theory, Community Development]*

Most arguments in the debate on the role of anthropology in development projects can be classed in two major categories: the ethical (the anthropologist's guiding limits as an "employee"), and the operational (how best to accomplish the task set forth by the employer). The latter area originally received emphasis during the fifties and early sixties in which the mentality of the recipient community was considered the major obstacle to "development." Although some space was given to socio-economic factors beyond

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