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Ethical Challenges and Responsible Policies in Community Development

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Abstract

Case studies from community driven development projects are used in order to present ethical challenges and possible solutions. Simple interventions in poor, disadvantaged communities aimed at improving livelihoods and household incomes are confronted with the new era general regulations, as well as with asymmetrical power relationships that threaten the achievement of the initial development objectives. A rural road built by the community is inadvertently used by big, log carrying trucks belonging to powerful companies. Both the road and the nearby forest are destroyed. A small wood processing activity aimed at generating income for a marginalized group is polluting the environment with shavings. The group succeeds to develop another activity, the production of shavings briquettes and consequently gets additional income and avoids pollution. A simple waste disposal solution is blocked by regional legislation that indicates general regulations for waste disposal. All these examples raise ethical issues. Is it right or wrong to engage in community driven development projects that can have unintended and/or unanticipated effects? Were the mentioned interventions good or bad? The answers to these questions change depending where one sits. The main idea of the paper is that sustainable futures are context dependent. Global, regional, national and local and community levels have requirements that need to be carefully balanced. Gradual, locally designed policies may be needed, as well as continuous impact evaluations, revisions and generation of new solutions. Corrupted power needs to be contained. Neither inclusive development nor sustainable development is sufficient. What is needed is inclusive and sustainable development, or, in other words, environmental and socially sustainable development. Two examples of responsible policies involving education and communication are also presented.