

ECHO International Agricultural Conference

Crowne Plaza Hotel, Ft. Myers, Fl.

14 Nov, 2018

Anthropology as a tool for facilitating agricultural development



Presenter: Joel Matthews, PhD.

Format: PowerPoint-based discussion

Length: 40-45 min

Anthropology as a tool for facilitating agricultural development



**This presentation is intended to help
development facilitators engage
positively with people from unfamiliar
cultures**

Presentation is based on two articles, which can be made available

Anthropology as a tool for facilitating agricultural development



Journal
Journal of Human Development and Capabilities
A Multi-Disciplinary Journal for People-Centered Development
Volume 18, 2017 - Issue 2: Special Issue on Social Innovation for Human Development

Understanding Indigenous Innovation in Rural West Africa: Challenges to Diffusion of Innovations Theory and Current Social Innovation Practice

ECHO® *Development Notes*

Edited by Dawn Berkelaar and Tim Motis

April 2018 | Issue 139

Anthropology as a Tool for Facilitating Agricultural Development

by Joel R. Matthews, PhD

From the Editors: Joel Matthews has often written to us in response to articles in EDN. His comments are always insightful. Now we are glad to share an article by Joel, sharing ways that tools used in cultural anthropology can also be used to facilitate people-centered agricultural development. Joel has worked, taught and researched in West Africa, and currently teaches in the department of Engineering Technology at Diablo Valley College.

Introduction: Worldview, culture, and development facilitation



Figure 1. Discussing farming opportunities with a group of dryland millet farmers in Niger. Source: Joel Matthews

facilitators tend to explain success or failure of farming ventures in terms of knowledge, techniques, and plants, while members of communities in non-western or developing countries may explain failure in terms of malevolent spiritual forces or social discord (Bradshaw 2002, Myers 2011, Verhelst 1990). While a modern worldview allows scientists to discover universal laws that govern cause and effect, it also tends to reject explanations that are not based on those laws. (Christians, however, accept the laws of physics while acknowledging that the universe is a created, and thus a spiritual domain.)

To hold a more expansive understanding of reality, we must reject some of the rigid naturalistic

Anthropology as a tool for facilitating agricultural development

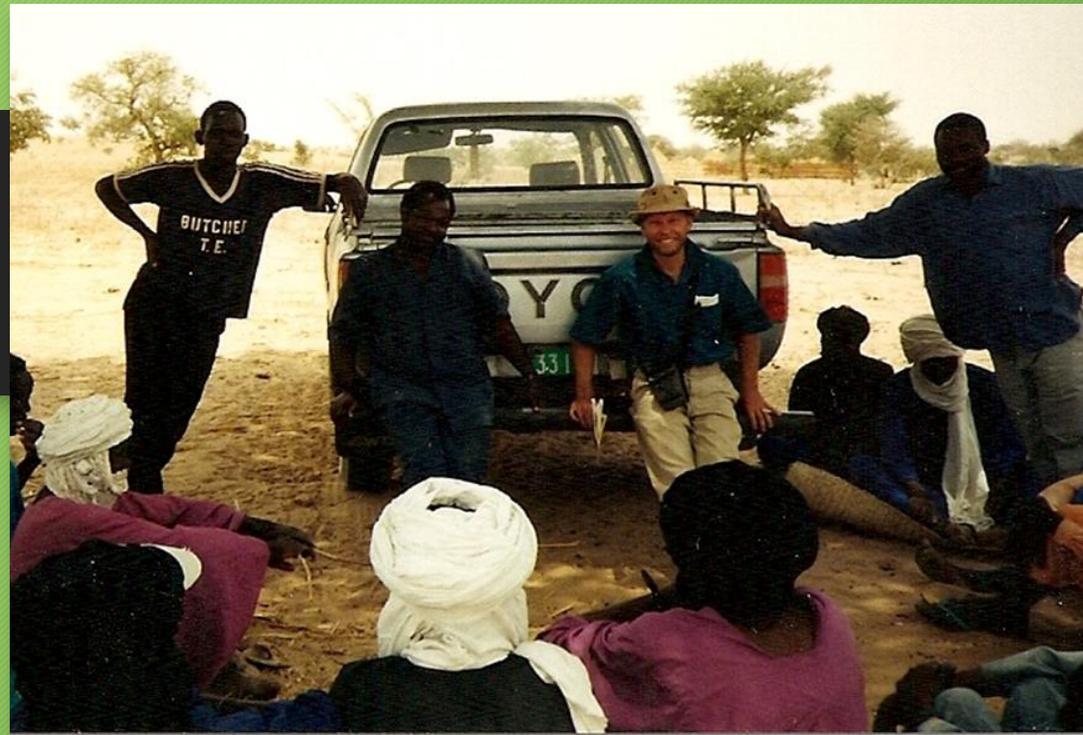


Outline:

- I. My development background in Africa
- II. Foundational social science concepts
- III. Utilizing social science tools to facilitate community development

I. Background

I worked for, and later directed the Maradi Integrated Development Project (MIDP) in Niger, West Africa.



Background

My wife and I raised our three children in this adobe house situated in a Hausa farming village



Background

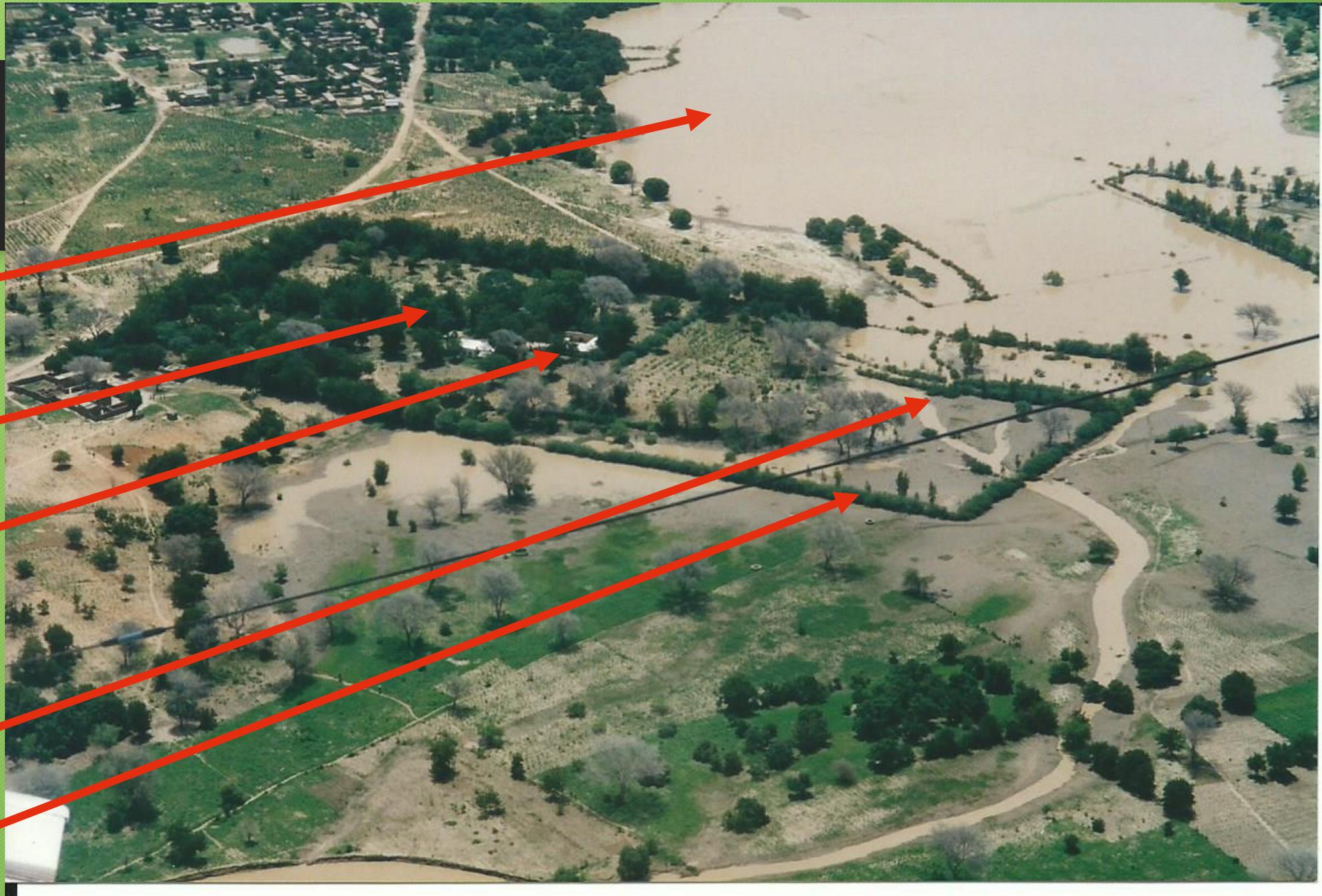
Seasonal inundation

Upland farming zone

Our home

Lowland farming zone

Live fence



Background

**Our school house
near the river**

My daughters



Background: Raising a family



Schoolhouse where
my wife schooled
our three children



Background: Raising a family



Playing with
friends while
washing clothes



Background: Raising a family



My son playing with neighbors



Background: Raising a family



My oldest daughter attending a wedding feast



Background

Nearby semi-arid
West African
village

- Grain silos

- Adobe walls

- Trails

- Trees

- Manured farms.



Background:

Working with farmers to facilitate innovation.



Tuareg farmer and associate



Village chief and associate digging Zai

Background: field supervisor
experimenting with Zai



Traditional millet vs. Zai-planted millet



**Experimental farm supervisor
harvesting live fencing poles**

Background:

Neighbor testing my crop residue chopper



Extension village testing our clay stoves

Background



Farm supervisor testing Australian Acacia for natural regeneration



Farm supervisor measuring elephant grass yield

Background



My son testing a World Vision foot pump



Experimenting with traditional hives



MIDP Food-for-work program used to promote innovation during a famine

II. Why are the tools of social science needed to improve development facilitation?



Development facilitators often report that cultural misunderstanding hinders their ability to help target populations identify and solve technical challenges.

1. How do the tools of social science form an important function in development facilitation?



The tools of social science allow outsiders to understand and effectively communicate with people from an unfamiliar society

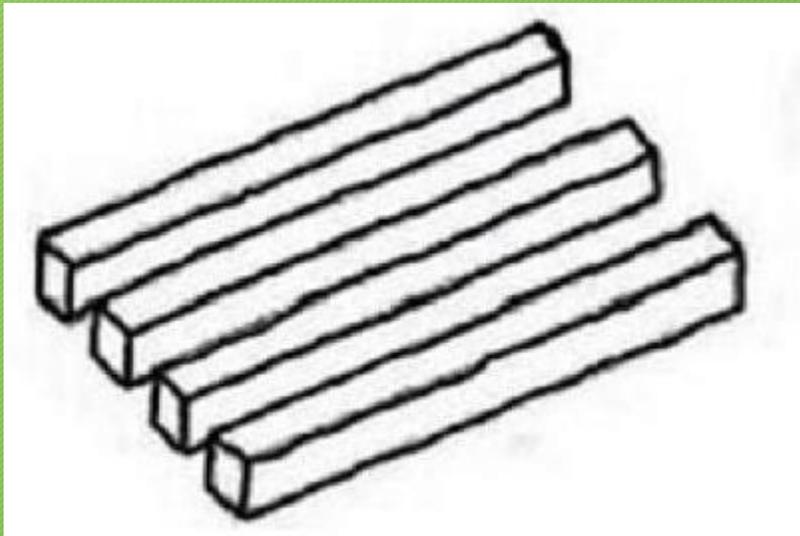


2. Key insight of social science: Human perception is mediated through assumptions, beliefs, and mental habits.

How can we see what others see?

Perception tends to be shared by members of a community.

4? →



← 3?



<https://slate.com/technology/2015/02/>

<https://slate.com/technology/2015/02/>

“Facts without interpretation are meaningless, and that’s a fact”



Facts do not speak for themselves.

The only way we can understand a message is to interpret it from within a particular framework

Example: “I read the Bible as it was written”



<https://csbible.com/3-tips-reading-bible-child/>

“Facts without interpretation are meaningless, and that’s a fact”



My wife may not understand my meaning.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eTAAiSqqYg4>

Imagine . . .



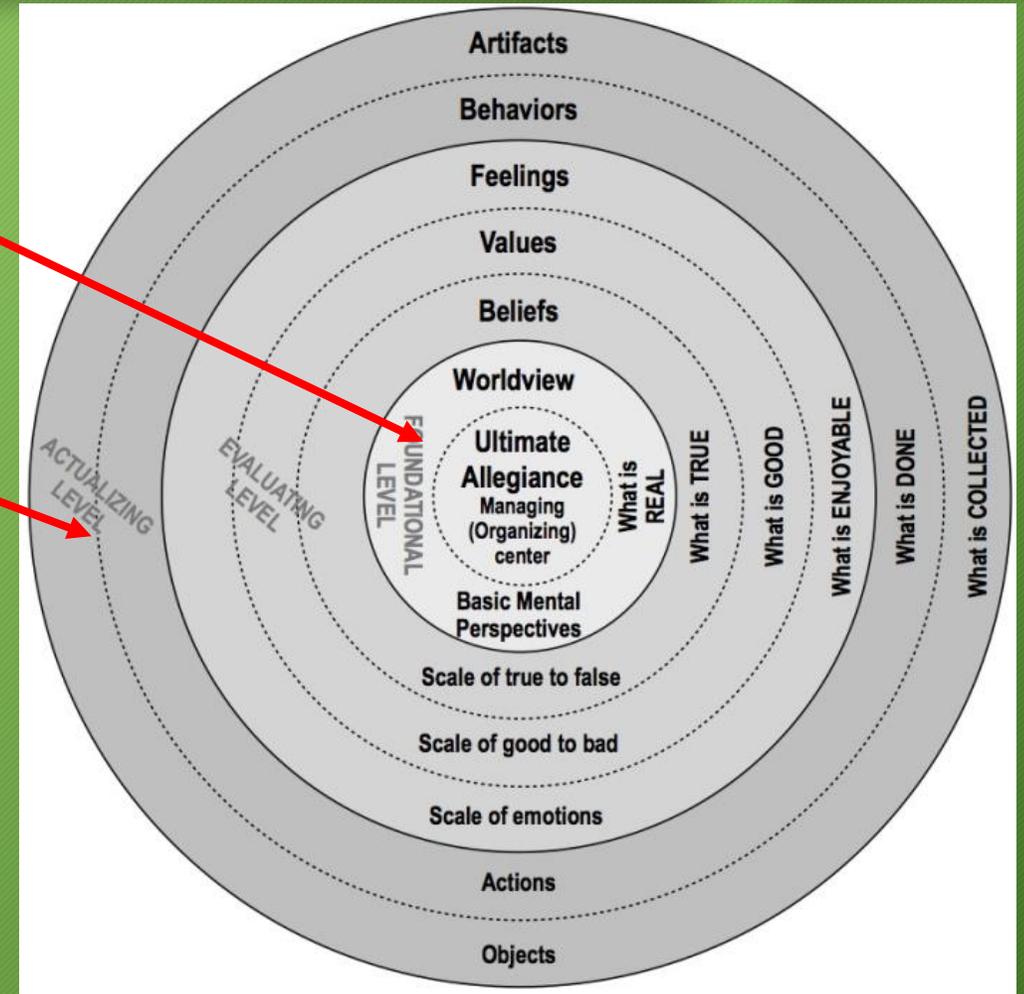
<https://www.enkivillage.org/cultural-misunderstanding-examples.html>

3. Worldview and Culture



Worldview consists of our basic assumptions about reality.

Culture is standardized behavior that reflects a particular worldview, which is shared by members a community



See Paul Hiebert: *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues*

Worldview: Differing interpretations of reality



Worldview issue: Secular, western-educated adults typically assume that the world functions according to orderly laws.

- Cultural expression #1: We believe in planning.
- Cultural expression # 2: We tend to explain farming in terms of knowledge, techniques, and plants.

Does the target community share that perspective?

See “Cultural Assumptions of Western Missionaries”, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, Paul Hiebert, 1985.

Worldview: Differing interpretations of reality



A box of “medicine” purchased from a medicine man in Niger, circa 2013.



4. Cultural relativity?



An important doctrine of cultural anthropology is cultural relativity. This concept claims that all *perception* is relative.

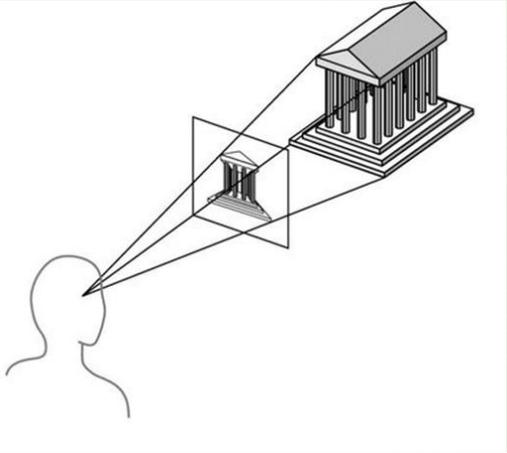
In other words, no single culture can claim the correct interpretation of reality.

See Paul Hiebert: *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues*

Cultural relativity?



Which perspective is correct?



Cultural relativity



Cultural relativity compels us to acknowledge that other ways of being and doing can be as valid as our own.



<https://nypost.com/2018/01/27/>



<https://www.dreamstime.com/stock-photo>

III. Outline of anthropological techniques adapted to development facilitation.



- a. Pre-field investigations (literature)
- b. Discussions with development professionals.
- c. Participatory Observation.
- d. Interviews and surveys.
- e. Analysis and debriefing.
- f. Facilitating a vision statement.

General pre-field literature: Anthropology



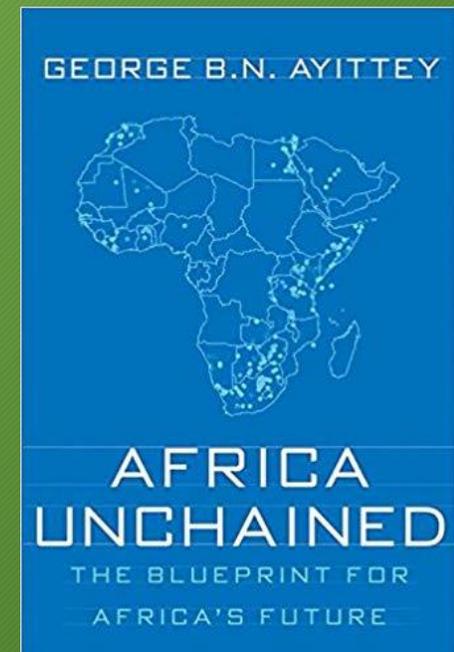
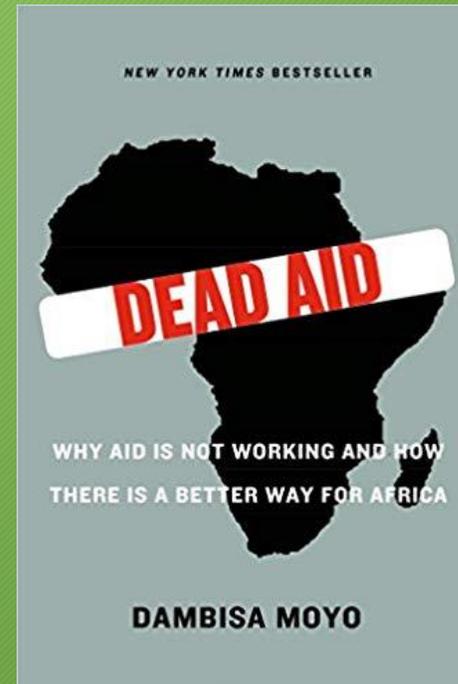
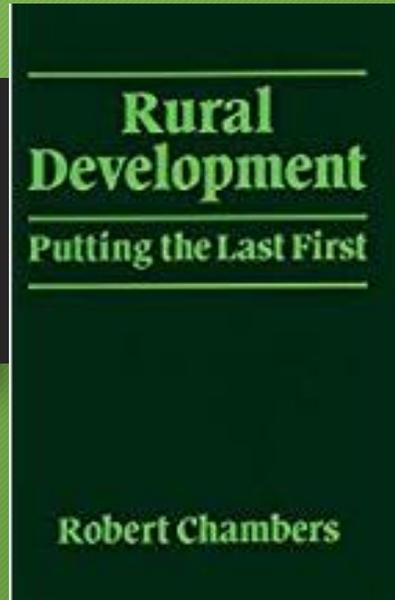
Examples:

- General anthropology: *Cultural Anthropology* (Haviland)
- Specific field techniques: *Participant observation, case study, focus groups, surveys, interviews.*
- This literature has not changed much over the years, so older, cheaper texts are adequate.

General literature: Key development thinkers

Be familiar with the ideas of key development thinkers such as Robert Chambers

And development critiques by native scholars: Example: African scholars such as Moyo 2009, Ayittey, 2005.



Region-based literature



It is important to read books and articles detailing the history of development in the region.

- This helps facilitators avoid the common error of proposing a particular solution without awareness of what has been tried before.

b. Discussion of context with experienced professionals



- Discuss details regarding what went wrong, what went right, and why:
- Discuss ways that assumptions changed during the development process and what the facilitators learned.

Agriculture *for* Development



**Tropical
Agriculture
Association**

Special Issue on Commercialisation of Smallholders
8th Hugh Bunting Memorial Lecture - Horticulture
Conservation Agriculture for sustainable intensification
Precision agriculture for smallholder farmers
Commercialisation and improved financial management
Hire services as a business
Hand-tool manufacture
Commercialisation of *Artemisia annua*

No. 19 Summer 2013

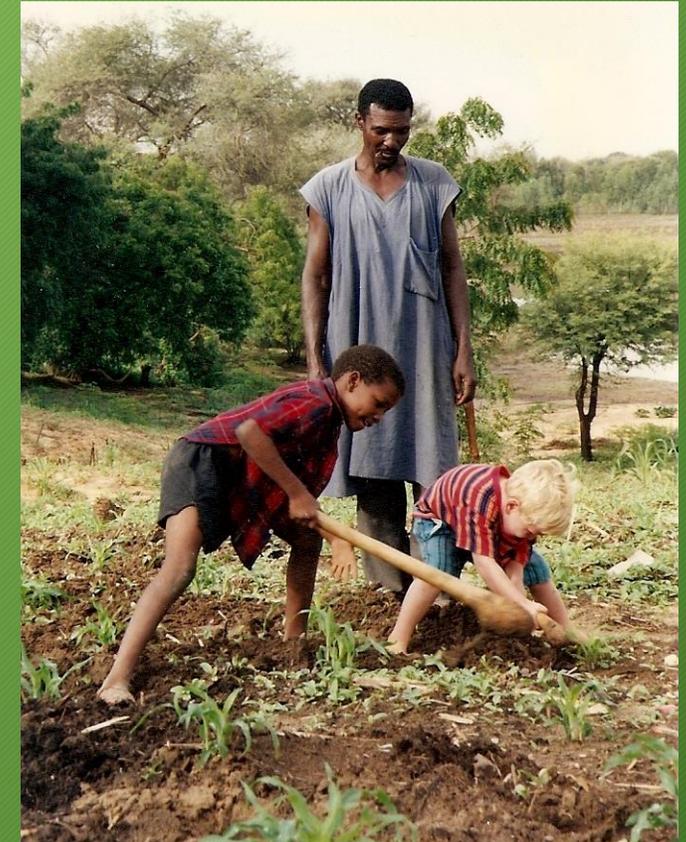
Population growth and food production

c. Utilizing the principles of participatory observation



Participant observation is used to learn “what is going on” and to gain the trust of local people.

This technique involves immersing yourself in the context to such a degree that, if possible, you eventually become “part of the scenery”.



Establishing legitimacy takes time and effort

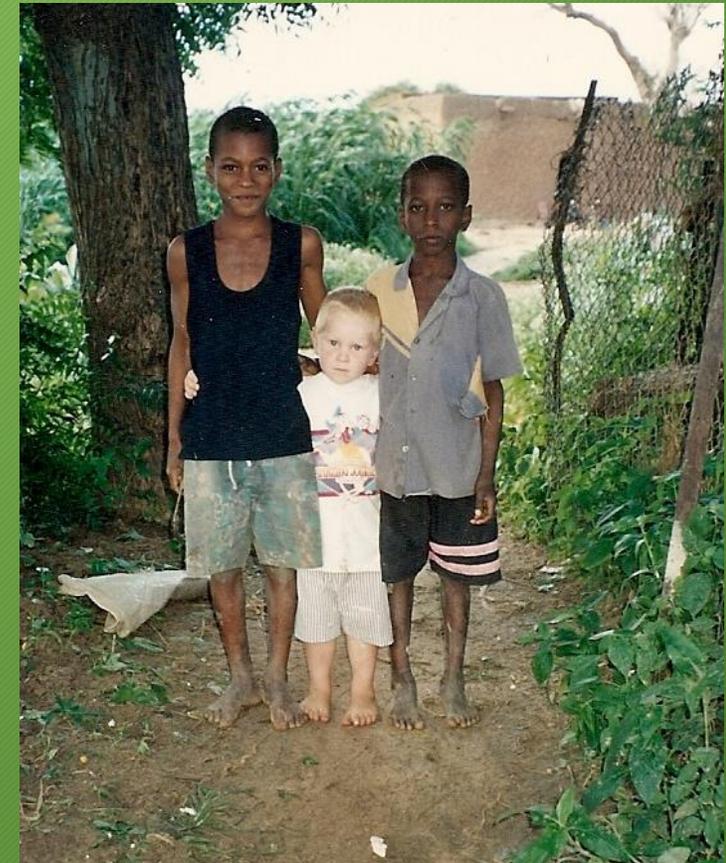


Don't be in a hurry to “get things done”.

- Without language, you will not communicate.

(Translation will work in a pinch)

- Without cultural knowledge, you will constantly offend and confuse people.
- Without friendships, people will have little interest in talking to you or following your advice.



d. Interviews and surveys



Begin systematically gathering information.

Three basic types of data collection:

- Surveys
- Fixed interview schedules
- Unstructured interviews



Surveys



Surveys allow rapid data collection (statistics) regarding issues that the surveyor has already decided are important.

Example: Marriage survey.

- How many times per week do you fight with your husband?
- More than 10
- 5-10
- 1-5
- 0

Surveys



Surveys work well when a lot is known about the situation but where statistics are lacking.

- Limitations:
 - Pre-conceived ideas take precedence.
- The questions many not work.
- May not gain new understanding.



See: Rural Development, Robert Chambers, 1983

Structured Interviews



Structured interviews: set questions that cannot be modified.

- Narrative response allows more detail than a survey.
- Works well when less is known about the situation.

Limitations:

- Participants only answer questions on the interview.
- Questions may not be appropriate.
- Questions not asked are questions not answered.

Guided discussions



Begin with a few key questions, leading to prolonged discussion.

- Works well when little is known about the topic.
 - Provides a richer understanding by allowing informants to offer details that the interviewer would not think of.
 - Works well in societies where people like to talk.
 - Conversational style is less threatening.
- Limitation: Difficult to use for statistics.



e. Analysis and Debriefing



Once you have conducted interviews you will analyze them.

This step is crucial for developing and testing hypotheses

You may hire local folk as assistants. They must be fluent in the language, understand their idioms, and do not have strong feelings about them.

f. Facilitating a vision statement



Without an articulated vision, groups may find it difficult to organize their priorities and activities in a way that furthers *their* aims.

Helping community members assess their activities in terms of *their* ideals

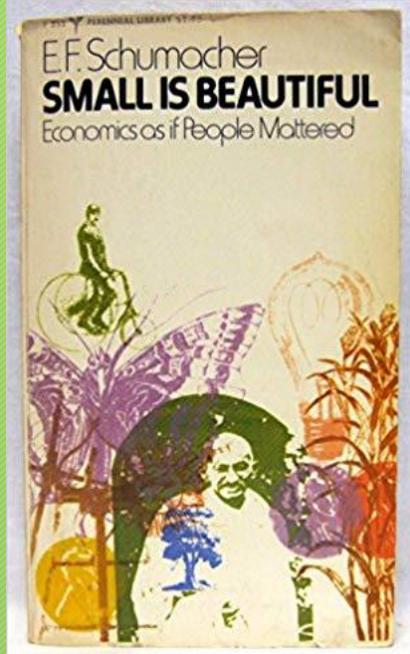
Facilitating a vision statement



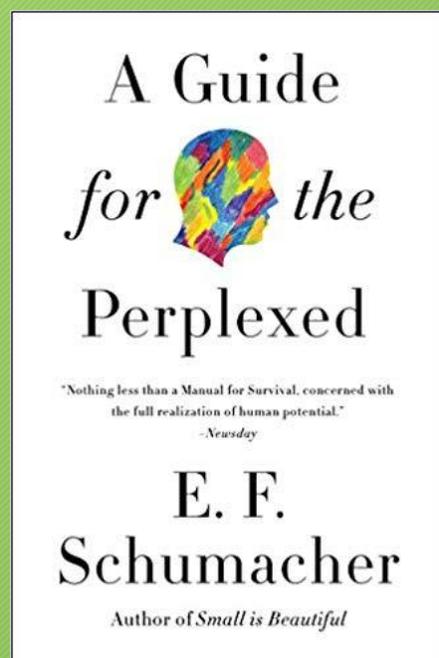
Facilitation does not bar development workers from introducing new ideas, but we should play a supporting, rather than a directing role.

In this photo I was asking women to articulate their vision, which I later learned, was inappropriate.



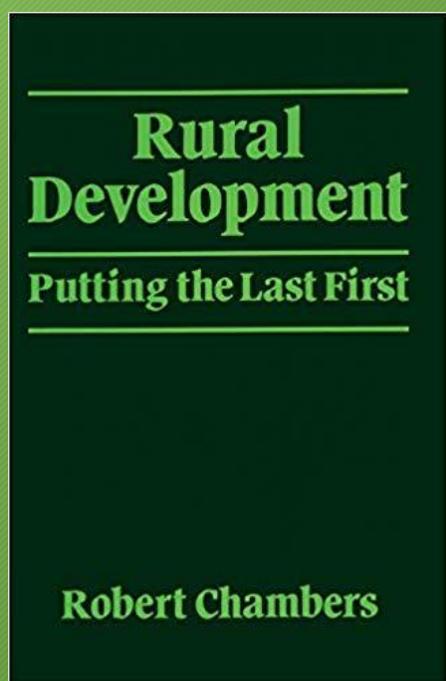


1973



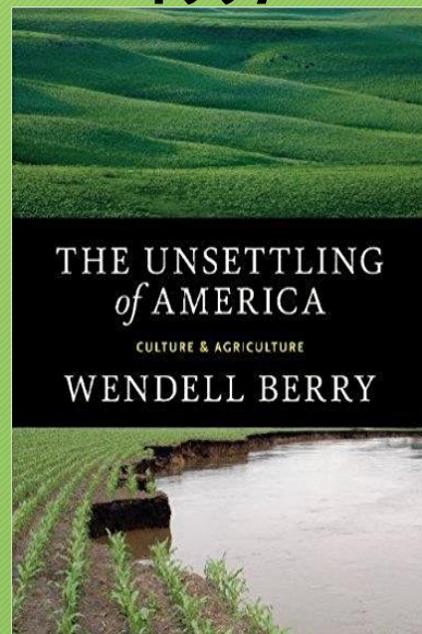
1977

Some of my key texts
Available in bookstore ■

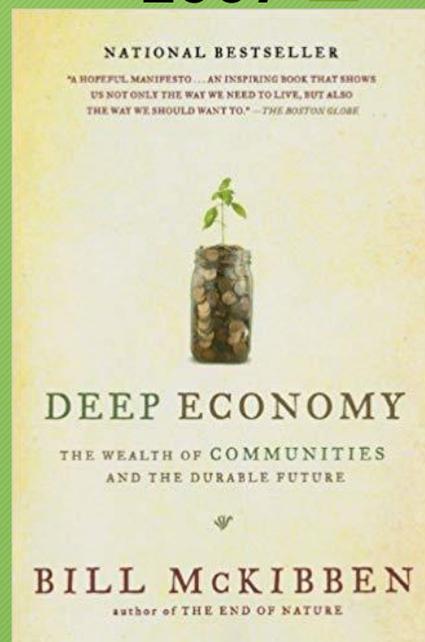


1983 ■

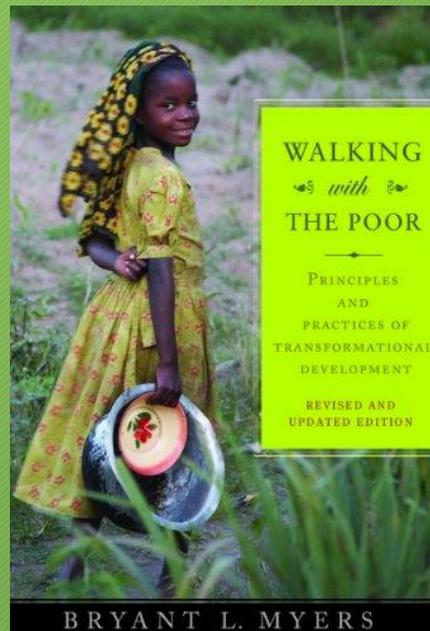
1997



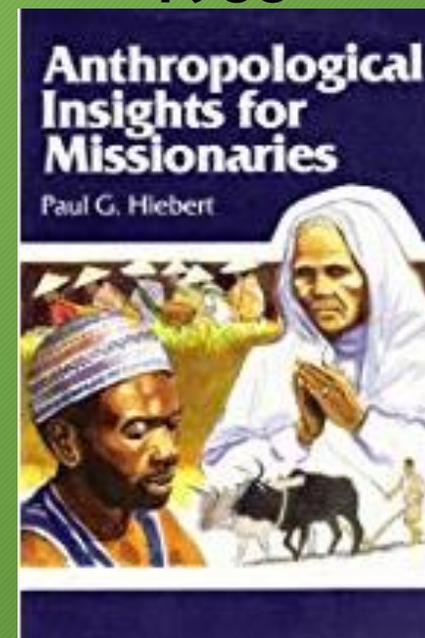
2007 ■



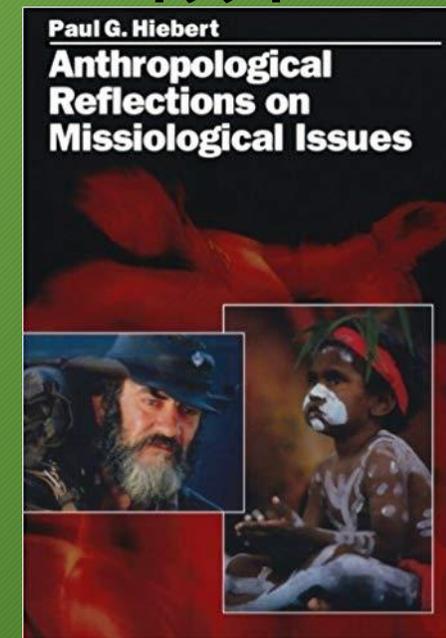
2011



1985 ■



1994



Discussions



Follow-up discussions will be held today
at the Global Farm classroom, 1:30-2:30