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## COCTA News 1989:2

### ENDOGENOUS SOCIOLOGICAL CONCEPTS: A Critical Problem in Developing Countries Call for Papers for the COCTA-sponsored INTER- COCTA Panel at the XII World Congress of Sociology, Madrid, 9-13 July 1990

The endogenous development of sociology and the other social sciences in many Third World countries is handicapped by conceptual limitations. These limitations derive from the understandable fact that these disciplines in their modern forms originated in Western countries from which they were exported to the rest of the world. Unavoidably, Western scholars, thinking mainly about the social structures and dynamics found in their own societies, cultivated and used the concepts needed in their own work. When non-Western scholars employ these concepts while doing research on fundamental problems encountered in their own societies, they discover at least two basic kinds of limitations.

*First*, because many, though not all, of the West's social science concepts presuppose cultural and social dynamics that are not universal, these concepts are often ill-adapted for use in the endogenous development of the social sciences in non-Western environments. Terms like 'class', 'nation', 'the state', 'family', 'bourgeoisie', 'individualism', 'pluralism', 'property', etc. all suggest and derive from experiences and realities that have only approximate counterparts in non-Western societies and even those that seem to fit well often suggest contexts or carry implications that are quite inappropriate. This is not to say that many concepts - those associated with methodology and the logic of inquiry, for example - are not universally applicable, as are most natural science and mathematical concepts.

*Second*, students of Third World realities easily recognize important phenomena and processes that defy clear explication by means of Western concepts and terms. To some degree this deficiency can be remedied by borrowing terms from regional languages. However, these words are heavily freighted with local connotations and they do not spread well - thus terms taken from Arabic, Chinese, Hausa, Sanscrit or Thai may be very useful in their original contexts, but it is difficult to gain acceptance for their widespread use to characterize realities that, in fact, may be pervasive throughout wide domains outside their original provenance. Such concepts, which are widely needed in Third World research, may originate from the impact of the outside world, from imperialism and industrialization, for example, and from pervasive conflicts between indigenous and foreign values and institutions. To handle these realities adequately, vigorously emerging sociological research needs to introduce and gain acceptance for a great many completely novel concepts, and the terms suitable for naming them.

