

**AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS DEPARTMENT AND EXTENSION
EDUCATION
AGE 311-RURAL SOCIOLOGY
MODELS OF SOCIETY**

Background to Models of Society

Several theories exist as pertains to the emergence of human societies. For example, the bang theory of yesteryear scientists and the evolution theories by scientists such as Darwin. By definition, society is “a group of people in more or less permanent association who are organized for their collective activities and who feel that they belong together”. Sometimes the word society is used to mean any reasonably large social system. Where social system refers to “the organization of reciprocal rights and duties which the culture prescribes for people occupying various positions in the society”. Studying societies raises a questions such as:

- What holds societies together?
- What keeps it steady?
- What pulls society apart? and
- What makes for change?

While such questions seem neutral enough, Sociologists like their collegeaus the Architects who build small scale models of a proposed building to better visualize it, often keep in mind a simplified picture of the society to be studied. The tendency has been to think fairly well of their societies by using a consensus, a conflict or evolutionary model of society. According to Dahrendorf (1958), analysis of societies contain the seed of controversy, and constitutes alternative starting points to contrasting models of society. Three such contrasted models the consensus, conflict and social evolution societies are presented here.

1 Contrasting Models of Society

(i) Consensus

The consensus model of society emphasizes social stability which is seen as fundamental sources of social cohesion. The persistence of shared ideas, shared traditions, shared ways of perceiving and understanding the World are more important. These being ingredients of social order and summed up in the assumption that every group is held by agreement (consensus) on basic rules and values that extend to details of everyday life. The consensus model, view societies to be

held together by the fact that most of their citizens hold many opinions and values in common. These values act as binding force. Any major changes occurring in society come rather slowly and depend on large scale shifts in attitudes and beliefs. Complaints in a consensus model of society are minor compared to patriotic sentiments.

Consensus model follows the tradition of Emile Durkheim, the French sociologist whose focus was on shared beliefs as the basis for social order and tends to have conservative overtones. In the final analysis, the model suggests that many proposals for change are unrealistic because they do not sufficiently take account of community beliefs.

(ii) Conflict

The conflict model of society holds that the most important aspect of social order is the domination of some groups by others. Society according to this perspective is understood as an arena of actual and potential conflict; and that when things look peaceful, it is only because someone is sitting on the lid. The model sees this domination as a key determinate in way people relate to one another. However, conflict theorists do not ignore the consensus model and its belief but, emphasize that popular attitudes are often sustained and maintained by groups in power. The model also challenges both Sumner and Spencer's assumptions that "a consensus, free enterprise would be an important step in progressing into the future".

To conflict theorists the poor, along with criminal elements represent the unfit destined to be eliminated in the struggle for survival. They also contend that the trend of society was one in which power was becoming concentrated in fewer hands and the poor were suffering. In this way, conflict model appeals to proponent of change for two reasons. Firstly, it identifies the potential for change especially the rise of new groups capable of challenging existing institutions and secondly, it suggests that a strategic shift in power can decisively affect a social history. Accordingly, the model serves to correct an overemphasis on the consensus model of analyzing societal issues. These themes are prominent in the writings of Karl Marx, whose work is the clearest example of the application of a conflict model to the study of society.

(iii) Social Evolution

Social evolutionists such as Auguste Comte long observed that societies tend to change in similar ways from simple to complex forms with societies advancing from low to higher levels of development. In particular, Comte's view of society is that it advances from the mythological stage to the philosophical stage and to scientific stage.

The mythological stage concerns the study of myths that is a widely believed but false story, idea and associated with the primitive stage at which things get done. The philosophical stage involves the study of existence, reality, knowledge, goodness et cetera with any of the various systems of thought having this as its base while, the scientific stage discerns itself with the study of knowledge which can be made into a system and which usually depends on seeing and testing facts and stating general laws.

2. Social Typologies

Such typologies may be villages, communities, families, groups or societies categorized into open and close, integrated or disintegrated units.

(i) **Open Community**

Is one receptive to change arising from influences originating from outside the local social system which affect it (i.e. system linkage is dominant as opposed to boundary maintenance).

(ii) **Close Community**

Has a relatively high degree of internal harmony as opposed to conflict, overt deviancy from norms and lacks consistency in the allocation of roles.

(iii) **Open Integrated**

Is usually relatively large with a diversity of occupations and displays in its institutional and organizational framework an adaptability towards changing conditions. Such a community is often seen as a social and economic centre for several surrounding communities. Within a community, a relatively large proportion of its inhabitants are involved in local affairs and a lot of initiative is shown in various ways. People are generally ready to accept duties and responsibilities. The community is relatively self-sufficient, socially and a general feeling of belonging exist and **is an active and proud** community.

(iv) **Close Integrated Community**

This type of a community is able to remain more or less isolated and with relatively stable population. It may vary in size, is broadly inward-looking, self-contained and traditional (i.e. in terms of attitudes, its mode of life and leadership). Such a community maintains firm boundaries against outside influences. Roles played by its members are well defined and a range of norms of social behavior relatively narrow as reflected in attitude for example towards newcomers or to external institutions (such as politics or national sport), which are often reinforced by its religious organizations. Despite the inevitable penetration of numerous urban influences

especially via mass media, the type of community still exists and by no means confined as might be imagined to the remoter areas of the country.

(v) **Open Disintegrated Community**

Is invariably (always) affected by changes at a rate which it cannot assimilate (take in). Changes arise due to a rapidly growing population. Common in commuter or dormitory communities and new industries due to incidences of inflow of population and occurrences of a high rate of population turnover characterized by an instability in an organization and a general lack of civic responsibility and leadership. Thus, external linkages are invariably greater than the internal bonds. Internally, tensions and conflict becomes common and such a community is almost but not quite completely an outward-looking community. New social ideas maybe enthusiastically received but dissensions among the newcomers or between the newcomers and the original inhabitants commonly lead to their discontinuance. In very real sense, such communities appear as a kind of **sub-urban** transferred to a rural setting

(vi) **Closed Disintegrated Community**

Is generally small and decreasing in size. Such a community has been enabled to adapt to change, or has resisted it. Often, the decreased labor requirements in agriculture, or the closure of a local source of employment, may have initiated the process. The resulting loss of population leads to a remaining number which is too small to maintain a viable community economy. Result of this is likely to be a progressively worsening in services, facilities and amenities, often hastened by planning decisions, with a feeling of helplessness among remaining inhabitants. This type of delaying village community is common in the **older industrial areas** of the country.

3. **Dichotomous Types of Society**

Several sociologists have used the concept of ideal types to compare and contrast different societies. The origin of the concept of Ideal Types is credited to the German sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920). Ideal Types are used in a classification system which is composed of two ideal types each of which form the opposite extremes of the classification system. The two ideal types are exaggerations of reality and are used only for reasons of comparisons. In reality nothing conforms perfectly to the characteristics of the ideal types.

Six dichotomous types falling at one or the other of the two continuum (i.e. is an unbroken series of progressions representing different degrees between the characteristics of two ideal types) have been identified by some early Sociologist. According to their areas of specialization the following authors have described the two extreme sides of societies as follows:

Author	Type of Society	Type of Society
Tonnies	Gemeinschaft	Gesellschaft
MacIver	Community	Association
Redfield	Folk	Urban
Maine	Status	Contract
Becker	Sacred	Secular
Durkheim	Mechanical Solidarity	Organic Solidarity

Ferdinand Tonnies (1855-1936) created two ideal types of societies called Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft. The Gemeinschaft was a traditional, rural, agrarian society, characterized by a strong sense of community with many primary relationships. The Gesellschaft was an industrial, urban, dynamic society in which secondary relationships dominate.

The **Gemeinschaft –Gessellschaft** dichotomy is purely a conceptual tool which assists in understanding that social ties can be categorized as belonging to personal social interactions, and the roles, values and beliefs based on such interaction to on one hand of the dichotomy the Gemeinschaft (German commonly translated community), or on the other hand as belonging to indirect interactions, impersonal roles , formal values , and beliefs based on such interactions characteristic of Gessellschaft (German commonly translated as society). These concepts were also used by Max Weber in the publication titled *Economy and Society* (1921) where he argued that **Gemeinschaft is rooted in a subjective feeling that may be “affectual or traditional”** while **Gessellschaft –based relationships are rooted in : rational agreement by mutual consent the best of which is a commercial contract.**

In summary, the Gemeinschaft dichotomy displays a sense of community found in families, villages, neighborhoods & friendship groups, have its members feel a sense of ‘we’ feeling which gives the group solidarity, each member is aware of and is recognized for h/her role in community and the group usually takes responsibility for members in need. The Gessellschaft on the other side will manifest features typical of a city or state, is generally, a large scale society where members associate without knowing each other, they are detached from their primary ties and their behavior patterns must be based on formal rules than folkways.

Community and Association as discussed by Robert Morrison MacIver explains any area of common life, village or country and other wider areas where all laws of the cosmos, physical, biological and psychological, conspire to bring it about that beings who live together shall resemble one another. Wherever men live together they

develop distinctive common characteristics such as manners, modes of speech, and so on. These are signs and consequences of an effective common life.

In short community is a focuses on social life. MacIver will have us believe that an association is an organization of social beings (or body of social beings as organized) for the pursuit of some common interest or interests. It is a determinate social unity built upon common purpose. For every need which men seek is more easily attained for all when all whom it concerns unite to seek it, when all cooperate in seeking it.

An American sociologist, Robert Redfield, created the ideal types of **Folk** and **Urban Society**.

The Folk Society is a small society which is physically and culturally isolated from other societies. This society is homogeneous, stable and has a simple division of labor with a strong sense of group solidarity. The ways of living are conventionalized into that coherent system called culture while, behavior is traditional, spontaneous, uncritical and personal; there is no legislation or habit of experiment and reflection for intellectual ends. Kinship, its relationships and institutions, are the type categories of experience and familial group is the unit of action. The sacred prevails over the secular; the economy is one of status rather than of the market.

The Urban Society is a large, dynamic and complex society with a heterogeneous population. The concept urban is synonymous to a city with close reference to population size and densities, an industrial or market-based economy or to the ideas about social complexities. The folk idea is mental construct and no known society precisely corresponds to it. Created only because through it we may hope to understand reality.

Status and Contract. Henry Sumner Maine characterizes the evolution towards progressive societies as a passage from status (an ascribed position) to contract (a voluntary stipulation). He introduced the idea that law and society developed "from status to contract." In his works, especially in *Ancient Law* (1861), Maine contrasted early societies in which social relations are dominated by *status* with "progressive" (complex) societies in which social relations are predominantly determined by *contract*. By status Maine meant "a condition of society in which all the relations of Persons are summed up in the relations of Family". These relations are ascribed to the individual as a member of a kinship group. By contract Maine meant individual obligation arising "from the free agreement of individuals."

Maine also through his work introduced the notion that societies moved from being bound by social status in their relationships, to independent individuals who were free to make contracts with other individuals. In ancient times, individuals were bound by social status and/or belonging to traditional social castes in the case of India. On the other side, in the modern world, people were regarded as independent entities,

free to make contracts on their own. Maine saw Roman law as the intermediate stage between ancient customs and modern British law. He believed that in ancient times legal bonds were firmly connected with customs rooted in the patriarchal family system. Maine held that the primitive kinship group is patrilineal and autocratic.

In that system all the goods, including land and the means of production, were the property of a family, and private property was practically non-existent. It was only in more recent times, with the development of settlements and later towns, that society started to apply principles of private property and depend on contract as means of creating larger and more complex relationships. The commands of the household headman are the authoritative expression of the *patria potestas*. "In truth, in the primitive view, Relationship is exactly limited by Patria Potestas. Where the Potestas begins, Kinship begins; .. here we have the reason why the descendants of females are outside the limits of archaic kinship". The polar opposite to the patriarchally dominated, kinship-determined condition of status is the kind of social system exemplified by the complex Roman society during the time of Justinian. This kind of system is marked by contract-determined relations wherein the first person promises to perform acts or to observe certain forbearances and wherein a second person signifies his expectation that the first party will fulfill the proffered promise. The mental act of consensus is theoretically separated from the external formality of the ritual of the pact or convention (e.g., in transfers of possessions), and an obligation has been added which receives the full support of legal enforcement. This is true contract.

Historically, Maine 's theory starts from a condition of society in which all the relations of Persons are summed up in the relations of Family, we seem to have steadily moved towards a phase of social order in which all these relations arise from the free agreement of Individuals.

Howard Becker (1899-1960) developed the concepts of the **Secular Society** and the **Sacred Society**. As constructed types, the Sacred Society is an isolated society with a high degree of "supernaturalism" and strong kinship ties. The Secular Society is a society based on rationality and science, characterized by formal laws and a lack of strong kinship ties. The isolation in sacred societies is said to lead to fixation of habits and neophobia, relations of avoidance, and traditional in-group –out group attitudes. Social contracts are primary in these types of societies with tradition and ritual playing a large part in the life of the individual.

There is dominance of sacredness even in the economic sphere, which works toward the maintenance of self-sufficiency and against any development of the pecuniary attitude. The division of labour is simple. Kinship ties are strong and are manifest in "great family" relationships. All forms of activity are under sacred sanctions, and hence violet social control is at a minimum. The forces of gossip and tradition

constitute powerful tools of control and non-rational behavior is predominate, with an important element of supernaturalism present. Rationalism, particularly in the form of science is largely absent. The value system is impermeable in such societies.

The secular societies lies at the opposite pole of the continuum and is vicinally, socially and mentally accessible. Habit fixation is renders difficulty by the accessibility of social structure. There is an absence of social barriers. Social circulation is unimpeded and individuals' ends are evaluated in terms of happiness and means according to the norm of efficiency. Tradition and ritual are minimal in secular type societies. Rationality is dominant, and science is pervasive and powerful. The kinship group is manifest in the conjugal family form. Innovation is frequent; change is frequent, change is sought after and idealized as progress. Informal sanctions are weak and formal law prevails. Offence against the law invokes little social approval. Legal contracts are the rule. Individuation is prominent in society and the value system is permeable.

A sacred society in short is represented as one in which resistance to change is at a maximum or, to say the very least, where change is in the highest degree unwelcome. These societies might also be called traditional customary, ceremonial, conservative, immobile, or prescriptive, spiritual but for this purposes, sacred and like terms carry the meaning well enough (well enough, that is, as long as holy, supernatural, spiritual, divine or religions in ordinary sense, are not regarded as synonyms). Boldly put. Societies which impress upon their members habits making for a high degree of resistance to change are sacred societies. Best examples of such societies are found in the old fashioned, backward or even primitive parts of the World. These societies are ordinary isolated away from highroads of commerce and the hum of communication.

Mechanical and organic solidarity, in the theory of the French social scientist Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), **the social cohesiveness of small, undifferentiated societies (mechanical) and of societies differentiated by a relatively complex division of labour (organic)**. In a society exhibiting mechanical solidarity, its cohesion and integration comes from the homogeneity of individuals as members of a society who have common values and beliefs. These common values and beliefs constitute a “collective conscience” that works internally in individual members to cause them to cooperate. People feel connected through similar work, educational and religious training, and lifestyle. **Mechanical solidarity normally operates in "traditional" and small-scale societies, and it is usually based on kinship ties of familial networks.**

In contrast to mechanical solidarity, organic solidarity is social integration that arises out of the need of individuals for one another's services. In a society characterized by organic solidarity, there is relatively greater division of labour, with individuals

functioning much like the interdependent but differentiated organs of a living body. Society relies less on imposing uniform rules on everyone and more on regulating the relations between different groups and persons, often through the greater use of contracts and laws.

The terms *solidarity* refers to “a bond of unity between individuals, united around a common goal or against a common enemy, such as the unifying principle that defines the labor movement. *Cohesion* is a state of cohering, or of working together. Hence, a society with mechanical solidarity tends to be highly characterized with societal members making similar contributions, developing a shared collective conscience, and upholds common norms and values, all of which components allow for social order to be maintained. Societies built around organic solidarity displays diversity of norms and behavior, individual liberty and are based on formal contracts and law.

4. Role Pattern Variables

Roles are defined in certain ways and according to Talcott Parsons, he used the word pattern variables to describe the different role performances in -families, communities or social groups. The table below presents comparative pattern variables as provided by Parsons.

ROLE PATTERN VARIABLES	
Particularism	Universalism
Affectivity	Affective neutrality
Difuseness	Specificity
Ascription	Achievement
Community -orientation	Self – orientation

Explained, a role performed on the basis of it being *particularism* in nature means that those performing it do so due to the importance or respecting attached to the person that has requested task or activity to be done. Treatment of tasks with same standards characterizes all tasks performed based on *universalism*. Thus, one need not respect the person requesting tasks to be performed but must do so as per expected standard or norm. *Affectivity* more or less refers to role performances based on liking the person or the task asked to be performed while, *affective neutrality* means there being no differences in tasks or making preferences as which persons are to perform given tasks. *Diffuseness* implies there being a wide variety of services to be performed as opposed to limited role performances associated with the term *specificity*.

Ascription is a condition that requires that whoever performs a certain role does so based on them being related to an official or to one in authority. *Achievement*

describes situations where persons due to their qualifications are hired to perform a task. Thus merit as opposed to one being hired because they know somebody in authority matters a lot here.

Last but not the least, *community-orientation* here implies neighborliness or a situation where we see groups of people perform tasks together with each individual associating themselves to given tasks and a general sense of a 'we feeling' of belonging cultivated. Particularism, affectivity, diffuseness and ascription all signify important aspects that together culminate into community orientation. On the other hand, when role performances tend to be based on the concern to achieving personal or own needs, then *self-orientation* gets to be perpetuated.

Compiled and adapted by D.J. Banda. Agric. Economics & Extension- 10/12/2015.