APPROPRIATE TECHNOLOGY: THE LAST FIFTY YEARS AND THEN COVID-19

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I would like to review how Appropriate Technology ideas have developed over the last fifty years and forecast where it is going, with some attention to the present pandemic. The term "Appropriate Technology" refers to two entities: software and hardware. Software is the approach, which is "small scale, simple enough to be maintained by users, controlled by the local community, labor intensive, energy efficient, and environmentally sound." Hardware is the devices created according to this approach. I see two themes in the last fifty years: first, the appropriate technology approach, the software, is more widely recognized--considered viable, and second, appropriate technology hardware is being done better. As for recognition, especially in less industrialized countries, where one hopes people would know that appropriate technology exists, they do. Even in more industrialized countries one senses an appreciation for simple designs. Renewable energy, with roots in appropriate technology, is widely accepted. As for the quality of the technology, standards for hardware have risen— much less acceptance now of makeshift apparatus that needs continual tinkering. The domain of appropriate technology has also expanded as hardware possibilities have increased. What are the implications of this domain expansion? I think most people would agree that a cell phone is an acceptable component in an appropriate technology design. What about a computer-based controller for a small -scale wind mill? When does the urge for technological excellence work against the aims of appropriate technology? Similar questions have been part of the appropriate technology approach for a long time but seem especially urgent now. Other papers in this conference are relevant to a consideration of when a technology is no longer appropriate. On another note, it appears that the isolation forced by the Covid 19 pandemic has encouraged people to think about small scale systems and user control. Will such considerations influence the direction of the development of appropriate technology?

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