

**THE ENVIRONMENT, THE ECONOMY, AND THE COMMUNITY:
New Approaches to Rural Community Development in British Columbia**

Introduction¹

From highly developed nations such as Japan to newly industrializing countries such as Korea and Malaysia to the relatively isolated island states of Oceania, many nations are experimenting with a shift toward devolution in their approach to community development--toward the decentralization of public responsibility from higher to lower levels of government and to community based non-governmental organizations (CBOs) (Jun and Wright 1996). Checkoway reports that

In industrial countries, political and economic changes have shifted previously public responsibilities to local areas and challenged communities to develop their capacity. In developing countries, government and non-government organizations have adopted community-oriented policies . . . (1995, p. 2).

Devolution arises from the view that conventional top down approaches have not been effective in addressing local community issues and that local communities themselves can be an important source of solutions. The thought is that local governments and CBOs are better attuned to the local community and so can better respond to the challenges they face (Kingsley 1996).

To shed light on this view I have been investigating the case of the Alberni Inlet and Clayoquot Sound area in western Vancouver Island, focusing on the community of Port Alberni, British Columbia. The immediate aim of my study is to interpret how the community's first-level leadership understands Port Alberni's

^{1/} Research for this paper was supported by a Canadian Studies Research Grant from the Canadian government. I am also grateful to Carol Rosskam, my research assistant on this project.