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Appropriate Technology: Concept Evolution and Development Direction

Muhammad Yasar[1*], Jurry Foo[2], Nor Diana Mohd. Idris[3]
[1]Agricultural Engineering Departement, Faculty of Agriculture, Universitas Syiah Kuala, Banda Aceh, Indonesia
[2]Faculty of Sciences and Humanities, Malaysia Sabah University
[5]Institute for Environment and Development (LESTARI), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia 43600 Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia
[1]yasar@usk.ac.id, [2]jurryfoo@gmail.com, [3]nordiana@ukm.edu.my

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***Corresponding Author**

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ABSTRACT

Appropriate Technology (APT) is a technological approach that has developed rapidly since the mid-20th century, particularly in the context of community and economic development in developing countries. This article reviews the evolution of the APT concept, its theoretical foundations, its role in sustainable development, challenges and criticisms, and the direction of research and practice in the modern era. The literature review shows that APT has evolved from a simple technological concept tailored to community needs to a strategic framework that integrates socio-cultural, economic, and environmental aspects within the context of sustainable development and social technological innovation. This article concludes that the future direction of APT development requires strengthening integration with the global sustainability agenda and formulating comprehensive assessment indicators.

INTRODUCTION

Appropriate Technology (APT) is a technology concept designed to meet community needs efficiently, affordably, and in a manner that is appropriate to the local socio-cultural and environmental context. This approach places community involvement as a crucial element in the technology design and implementation process, ensuring that the resulting technology becomes not only a tool but also an agent of community empowerment (Aulia et al., 2022).

The concept of APT was first systematically introduced in the 20th century as a response to the dominance of modern technology, which was often irrelevant to the needs of communities in developing countries. This is reflected in the literature, which shows that APT is not simply a simple technology, but a development approach that emphasizes the use of local resources, socio-cultural considerations, and an orientation toward community sustainability (Patnaik & Tarei, 2022).

The majority of APT practices are in areas such as agricultural artifacts, small scale renewable energy, sanitation, and clean water, where community involvement and understanding of the local context are key to successful implementation. Recent studies have shown that integrating APT into sustainable development design can provide economic, social, and environmental benefits simultaneously such as reducing the cost of technology utilization, increasing the independence of local businesses, and fostering social inclusivity through community involvement in the design and utilization of the technology itself (Sonjaya et al., 2024).

In the context of sustainable development, APT is also seen as an important tool for achieving broader development goals, including poverty reduction and environmental protection. This concept is increasingly important when high-tech solutions are not always optimal in areas with limited resources and local technical capacity. This approach aims to use sustainable, easily adopted technologies that support community resilience to global challenges such as climate change and energy constraints (Amiolemen et al. 2012).

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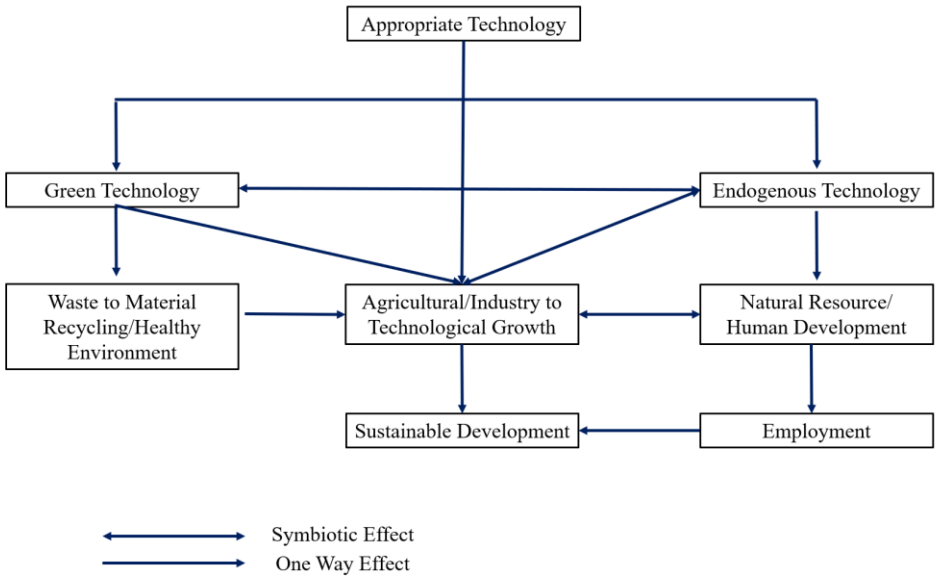

Figure1. Appropriate technology model for sustainable development (Amiolemen, 2012)

Figure 1 explains that appropriate technology serves as the primary framework for achieving sustainable development through the integration of two main approaches: green technology and endogenous technology. Green technology contributes to waste management, material recycling, and the creation of a healthy environment, which then encourages technological growth in the agricultural and industrial sectors. Meanwhile, endogenous technology (technology based on local potential) strengthens the utilization of natural resources and human development, which has an impact on increasing employment opportunities. The growth of agricultural and industrial technology is the main node connecting the two approaches and leading to sustainable development. The two-way arrow indicates a symbiotic (mutually reinforcing) relationship, while the one-way arrow indicates a direct influence. Thus, this model emphasizes that sustainable development is achieved through the synergy between environmentally friendly innovation, strengthening local capacity, growth of the productive sector, and job creation.

Furthermore, APT in the modern era continues to expand its scope, including the use of simple technologies combined with local innovations to encourage grassroots innovation and social transformation in developing countries. This combination results in a technology strategy that is not only technically "appropriate" but also economically and culturally adaptable to the target community (Patnaik & Tarei, 2022).

Thus, the importance of reviewing the literature on APT lies not only in understanding its definition and characteristics, but also in how this concept continues to evolve in response to global development challenges. This includes conceptual questions such as how APT can be integrated with innovation systems, community participation mechanisms, and public policies that support its sustainable use.

EVOLUTION OF THE CONCEPT OF APPROPRIATE TECHNOLOGY

History and Definition

Accrording to Hollick (2002), the Appropriate Technology movement emerged in the mid-20th century as a response to criticism of modern technology, which was perceived as lacking relevance to the needs of lower-class communities in developing countries. This approach advocates the use of simple yet relevant technologies to meet basic community needs and strengthen local self-reliance.

The development of the APT concept is inseparable from the idea of alternative development, namely technology that not only produces technical output but also improves the socio-economic well-being of society. In international literature, Appropriate Technology is defined as technology that has a positive impact on meeting basic human needs and is closely linked to alternative development strategies (Patnaik & Bhowmick, 2019).

Since its introduction by Ernst Friedrich “Fritz” Schumacher as an intermediate technology in the context of post-war economic development, the concept of Appropriate Technology has evolved from simply an alternative to expensive modern technology into a broader philosophical approach to sustainable and participatory development. The

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term appropriate technology itself was chosen to replace the term intermediate technology because it implies that technology is not only at a level between traditional and modern, but must also be "appropriate" socio-culturally and more easily accepted by the local communities it targets. Schumacher emphasized that technology must increase employment opportunities and improve the welfare of the wider community, not just production efficiency which can result in unemployment and social inequality (Hazeltine & Bull, 1999).

The intellectual journey of Appropriate Technology reflects a shift from a purely technical orientation to a more systemic, humanistic, and environmentally-centric approach. In modern literature, appropriate technology is described as having characteristics such as being small-scale, energy-efficient, environmentally friendly, and locally controlled, all of which align with the principles of sustainable development. Contemporary scholars also argue that this concept should not be viewed as a "second-class" technology, but rather as a response to the complexity of development challenges in developing countries that require solutions tailored to local contexts and complemented by community participation in their design and implementation (Sianipar, et. al. 2013).

In recent developments, studies on Appropriate Technology increasingly incorporate integration with social innovation and open-source appropriate technology principles. This open-source model expands access to technological designs that can be modified to meet community needs, thus avoiding the constraints of copyright or expensive proprietary technology. This approach is increasingly relevant in the era of globalization and digitalization, where communities' ability to adapt and disseminate local technological innovations is key to inclusive and environmentally friendly development (Pearce, 2012).

Criteria and Characteristics

According to Aulia et al. (2022), the concept of appropriate technology emphasizes that technology must be easily accessible and usable by local communities as the primary users. This means that the technology does not require a particularly high level of education or skills, allowing it to be widely operated without relying on external experts. Furthermore, appropriate technology must be affordable and utilize locally available resources. This ensures that production, distribution, and utilization processes can be carried out efficiently and sustainably without burdening the community financially.

Furthermore, appropriate technology is also required to be environmentally friendly and support the principles of long-term sustainability. The use of environmentally friendly materials, energy efficiency, and minimal waste are important considerations in its implementation. Additionally, the technology must be responsive to the culture and social needs of the local community, aligning with local values and avoiding social resistance. Ultimately, appropriate technology should ideally be able to be independently maintained and improved by the community without intensive dependence on external technical support, thereby strengthening local independence and capacity in the development process.

Complementing this perspective, the appropriate technology approach is increasingly relevant within the framework of inclusive development and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) launched by the United Nations. In this context, technology is not merely a means of production, but an instrument of empowerment that promotes poverty reduction, improved education quality, and access to clean energy and adequate sanitation. The SDGs report emphasizes the importance of affordable, adaptive, and community-based innovation so that the benefits of development can be felt equitably, especially in developing countries. This approach aligns with the principle of appropriate technology, which positions communities as subjects, not merely objects, of development (https://sdgs.un.org/goals).

Moreover, the concept of appropriate technology is also widely integrated into community-based development strategies by institutions such as the World Bank, which emphasizes the importance of community-driven development. In its various programs, the World Bank encourages the use of simple, cost-effective, and easily replicated technologies to improve local economic resilience, particularly in the agriculture, small-scale renewable energy, and clean water management sectors. This approach has been proven to increase community participation and strengthen local capacity in infrastructure maintenance. Thus, appropriate technology has not only a technical dimension, but also an institutional and socio-economic dimension, as it contributes to increased productivity while strengthening community-based governance (https://www.worldbank.org/)

Theoretical Foundation and Conceptual Framework

APT is not just about tools, but also about the process of social empowerment through technology. This is evident in various community empowerment practices implemented through APT, such as clean water production,

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simple agricultural technology, and local waste management. This approach leverages community participation from every stage of design through implementation, resulting in more adaptive and sustainable solutions (Nekky Rahmiyati, 2015).

Modern conceptual frameworks also link APT to sustainable development, namely technologies that not only solve practical problems but also consider long-term environmental, economic, and social impacts. This makes APT relevant to global agendas such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Patnaik & Bhowmick, 2019).

Figure 2. Conceptual Framework of Appropriate Technology

Figure 2 illustrates the close relationship between appropriate technology, environmental sustainability, and economic development in a mutually supportive cycle. Appropriate Technology is the driving force, emphasizing the use of technology tailored to the needs and capacities of local communities. On the left, Environmental Sustainability demonstrates that technology implementation must maintain environmental sustainability through energy efficiency, waste reduction, and the wise use of natural resources. On the right, Economic Development illustrates that appropriate technology can drive economic growth, increase productivity, and create business opportunities without damaging ecosystems. This reciprocal relationship aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework, which emphasizes the integration of economic, social, and environmental aspects in long-term development (https://sdgs.un.org/goals).

The figure also emphasizes that appropriate technology aims to produce long-term sustainable solutions, not just short-term profits. This concept aligns with the sustainable development approach promoted by the World Bank, particularly in community-based development programs and environmentally friendly infrastructure. Technology that is easily accessible, affordable, and independently maintained by communities will strengthen local economic resilience while maintaining environmental balance. Thus, the image emphasizes that successful development lies in the synergy between technological innovation, ecological sustainability, and inclusive economic growth (https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/sustainability)

CHALLENGES AND CRITICISMS OF APT

Although APT was conceived as an efficient technological solution tailored to community needs, it has received criticism from various sources. The main criticism is that some APT implementations often fail because they are perceived as "less efficient" or less capable of significantly improving living standards than advanced technologies. However, this criticism sometimes fails to consider the local context and the social empowerment goals that are the primary focus of APT (Akubue, 2000).

Other problems that often arise in the implementation of APT are the incompatibility between technology and local conditions, lack of institutional support, and limited human resources capable of optimally utilizing APT (Rahmiyati, 2015). The incompatibility of Appropriate Technology (APT) with local conditions often arises because the design process does not fully consider the social, economic, cultural, and geographic characteristics of the target community. Technology deemed technically effective may not be compatible with the community's real needs, local production patterns, or user purchasing power. For example, modern agricultural tools that require stable electricity or

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specific raw materials become less relevant in areas with limited infrastructure. As a result, APT, which should increase productivity, is not utilized sustainably and may even be abandoned after the mentoring project is completed. This demonstrates the importance of a participatory approach in the process of identifying needs, designing, and evaluating technology to ensure it is truly contextual and adaptive to local conditions.

Furthermore, a lack of institutional support and limited human resources are also significant obstacles to optimizing APT. Institutional support includes conducive regulations, sustainable funding, access to financing, and coordination between institutions, which is often not well integrated. Without a strong institutional ecosystem, the development and replication of APT are difficult to achieve on a large scale. Furthermore, human resource capacity both in terms of technical and managerial skills is often inadequate to operate, maintain, and develop the technology. The lack of ongoing training and mentoring has resulted in low adoption and sustainability of APT. Therefore, capacity-building strategies and institutional synergy are key to ensuring APT is not only implemented but also delivers sustainable economic and social impacts.

APT DEVELOPMENT DIRECTION

Integration with Sustainable Development

In response to global challenges such as climate change, poverty, and social inequality, modern literature emphasizes the importance of developing integrated APT within a sustainable development framework. This includes efficient resource use, renewable energy, and participatory methods to strengthen community self-reliance (Patnaik & Bhowmick, 2019).

The development of Appropriate Technology (APT) is no longer understood merely as a small-scale technical innovation, but as an instrument of structural transformation within the framework of sustainable development. In a perspective aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) agenda, APT is directed at supporting resource efficiency, clean energy transitions, and responsible production and consumption. The integration of renewable energy technologies such as community-scale solar panels, household biogas, and water-saving gravity-based irrigation systems are concrete examples of how APT can reduce carbon emissions while increasing local economic productivity. With this approach, APT acts as a catalyst in creating inclusive and low-carbon growth (low-carbon development pathways), particularly in rural and underdeveloped areas (Simanjuntak et al., 2024).

Furthermore, modern literature emphasizes that the success of APT depends heavily on participatory methods and community empowerment (community-driven development). Technology should not be top-down, but rather must be developed through a co-creative process that involves the community as the primary subject, not simply as a beneficiary. This approach strengthens self-reliance, increases local institutional capacity, and minimizes the risk of technology adoption failure. In the context of public economics and regional development—which is also relevant to fiscal dynamics and decentralization—APT can reduce dependence on external transfers, strengthen the local economic base, and create a multiplier effect through community-based job creation. Thus, APT is not merely a technical solution, but a development strategy that simultaneously links ecological, social, and economic dimensions (Heather M. Murphy, et al., 2009).

Social Innovation and New Technologies

The digital era opens up opportunities to integrate APT with new technological innovations, such as digital applications for waste management, renewable energy-based tools, and simple automation based on local technology. This approach not only maintains APT principles but also responds to the needs of society in this fast-paced technological era (Suwarni et al., 2024).

The integration of waste management (APT) with digital technology also broadens the dimensions of community empowerment, not only in production but also in governance and system efficiency. The use of Android-based applications for waste bank recording, MSME production monitoring, and digital marketing enables village communities to increase transparency, accountability, and broader market access. In the context of local economic development, this transformation creates a data-driven community development ecosystem that strengthens participatory planning. Thus, APT is no longer understood as a simple physical tool, but as an integrated system combining technology, management, and social capacity.

Furthermore, the integration of small-scale renewable energy sources such as solar panels for irrigation, solar-powered agricultural dryers, or household biodigesters demonstrates that APT innovations can align with the sustainable development agenda. Simple automation based on local microcontrollers can also increase productivity without eliminating the labor-intensive nature of APT. This approach strikes a balance between technological efficiency and social inclusivity, ensuring that digital transformation does not marginalize vulnerable groups but instead expands

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access and improves community well-being. With an adaptive policy direction, digital-based APT has the potential to become a strategic instrument in strengthening regional economic resilience in the era of technological disruption.

The Role of Policies and Institutions

Governments and development agencies have a crucial role to play in supporting APT through regulations, funding, and ongoing technical training programs. Policies that facilitate active community participation in the design and use of technology will strengthen the impact of APT on community empowerment (Megawati & Adianto, 2021).

Furthermore, local government support is crucial in ensuring that the implementation of Appropriate Technology (APT) aligns with specific regional needs. Synergy between technical ministries, local governments, universities, and the private sector can create an adaptive and sustainable innovation ecosystem. Through incentive schemes, applied research grants, and ease of licensing for local innovators, the government can encourage the development of technological solutions based on regional potential. In this context, research institutions and business incubators play a role as a bridge between research results and real community needs, ensuring that APT does not stop at the prototype stage but is truly adopted and utilized widely.

Furthermore, the sustainability of APT is also determined by systematic monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. The government and development agencies need to ensure long-term support, including maintenance training and community technical capacity development. A participatory approach that positions communities as subjects, rather than mere recipients of the program, will foster a sense of ownership and sustainable use of the technology. Thus, APT becomes not only an instrument for increasing economic productivity but also a means of social transformation that strengthens community independence and resilience.

CONCLUSION

APT has evolved from a simple technology to a holistic approach to technological development involving society, the environment, and socioeconomic aspects. Research developments demonstrate the need to integrate APT within the framework of sustainable development and social innovation. Future development should focus on community empowerment strategies, the digitalization of appropriate technology, and the strengthening of institutional policies to ensure the sustainability and relevance of APT in a global context.

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