

# Failure of the old concepts and new strategies for a sustainable development

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**Abstract.** *This paper is a theoretical description of the conception of international development and the failure of its function during the past 30 years. It mentions that the patterns of the old concepts have to be radically changed.*

*It highlights the importance of introducing into the new paradigm of development, the concept of moral and spiritual values as both, the vital foundation and the key to global transformation which has to take place.*

## Introduction

For several decades, theories of development have been changing. Today the dramatic results of 30 years of development force us to redefine it at a global level and to establish new strategies for the 21st century.

Development, in the past, has been almost synonymous to economic growth, but in the best cases, the poorest section of the population has not necessarily benefited from the trickle down effect, in the worst cases, the poor are poorer.

Why do we need a new paradigm in development? Because the current trends in international relations show a sombre future for rich and poor countries. The last decade is often called the "lost decade". The main global issues: poverty, monetary disorder, mounting debts and deficits, growing population, unemployment, pollution of the environment, are all suffering major tensions; it is dangerous enough to continue in the same way, but it can easily worsen if nothing is changed.

The past generation has had the technology to go to the moon but not the means or the desire to feed all the children of its own planet; perhaps the worst paradox that humankind has faced?

The problem is serious, and it cannot be ignored much longer; however, new solutions are emerging.

Global collaboration and major transformations are becoming visible.

A development with a human face and with moral and spiritual values, based on the dignity of the people and not on their productivity has become imperative. By bringing moral values: compassion, respect, consultation, justice, honesty, dignity, gender equality, solidarity and care to global issues, transformation can be achieved.

## I. Old theories

The last decade has seen a rapid advancement of high technology, but we have not developed a technology which would help us solve our major problems. On the contrary, the signs of breakdown are present in the industrialised and the developing countries. Everywhere, the problems are growing faster than the solutions.

In the past, development has been helping the top section of the population of the poor countries, those who really did not need assistance, as it is always easier to help those who can help themselves. The tax-payers of the donor countries have been mainly helping the rich of the poor countries. Education programs in developing countries have helped educated people to become more educated, while the vast majority remained illiterate.

The policies of the old concepts were based on the principles of domination, power, oppression, racial, class or sex discrimination, extreme accumulation of wealth versus extreme expansion of poverty, exploitation of resources and labour, greed, competition, corruption, dictatorship, inequality of decision making based on the complex of assistance (the donor is rich and educated while the recipient is poor and uneducated). Development has been like having one man in a boat trying to negotiate with

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another man drowning in the ocean, who will have more power?

So, development based on these principles was bound to fail. One of the reasons for the failure of the prevailing 20th century economic development model has been its inability to recognize and take into account the importance of the human values that motivates much of humanity. Many developing countries have given up a lot in terms of cultural identity to attain Western style development without having made significant economic gain.

## II. Poverty

While the definitions of development were changing, the major issues in development did not: basic resources must be available to the poorest of the poorest, and reduction of poverty must be the priority on the development agenda. The needs of the poor are relatively simple, probably so simple that the rich cannot understand them. When poverty means hunger, we are not talking of the "best" or "even second best" but rather the most essential means of subsistence.

Poverty is the result of inequality and injustice, based on exploitation, unbalanced distribution of income which has been, not only accepted, but perpetuated and promoted along centuries. How long can the industrialised countries consume the largest part of the resources when the developing countries count the majority of the population? How long can we show the poor countries what they could do if they were rich?

A person in North America consumes on average 20 times more than a person in India or in China, and 60 times more than a person in Bangladesh (FNUP, 1994: 6).

According to the following definition of development "a positive change in the life of the bottom fifty percent of the people" (Yunus, 1992: 19) the development conducive to the elimination of the worst aspects of poverty has, in the past 30 years, ailed, and poverty is increasing everywhere, in the developing as well as in the industrialised countries although the latter ones thought their models were the best and should be exported.

Since 1960, the development has been based on economic growth, it has ignored completely the concept of repartition, and only rich and educated people could benefit from the Western model as it was not adapted to the traditional ways of living.

In most developing countries, international aid and development programs have benefited the rich minority, leaving the poor majority in poorest conditions, it is called the development of the underdevelopment. The Gross National Product (GNP), imports, exports, investments, savings, infrastructure, all have been misleading, and were nothing else but an abstract concept for the poor.

The fact is that the poor are getting poorer while the rich are getting richer, and development has not only been unable to change this tendency, but often it promotes it.

The gap between rich and poor countries is not only considerable, but it is widening, as the economic growth rarely filters down to the poor people.

Between 1960 and 1989, the countries with the richest 20% of the world population grew 2,7 times faster than the bottom 20%. See tables 1, 2 and 3.

If we look at the global distribution of income, it becomes obvious that we are living in an extremely unbalanced economy, and unjust social repartition.

In Africa, per capita electricity consumption as an index for development has no meaning because the poor people do not even consume any electricity, as for new highways, poor people do not have cars. So whose benefit are we serving? The majority of the projects in the past 30 years did not even target the poorest section of the population.

Indicators are imperfect, at best, and data uneven. However, estimates are that about 14,5 million Central Americans or 56 percent of the population are poor. Of these, about 9.1 million people or 35 percent of the population are extremely poor (Annis, 1992: 5).

| TABLE 1                                       |                |                |                       |                     |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| DISPARITY BETWEEN RICH AND POOR GLOBAL INCOME |                |                |                       |                     |
| DISPARITY, 1960-1989                          |                |                |                       |                     |
| PERCENTAGE OF GLOBAL INCOME                   |                |                |                       |                     |
|                                               | POOREST<br>20% | RICHEST<br>20% | RICHEST TO<br>POOREST | GINI<br>COEFFICIENT |
| 1960                                          | 2.3            | 70.2           | 30 to 1               | 0.69                |
| 1970                                          | 2.3            | 73.9           | 32 to 1               | 0.71                |
| 1980                                          | 1.7            | 76.3           | 45 to 1               | 0.79                |
| 1989                                          | 1.4            | 82.7           | 59 to 1               | 0.87                |

| TABLE 2               |        |       |                        |                     |
|-----------------------|--------|-------|------------------------|---------------------|
| GLOBAL ECONOMY, 1989  |        |       |                        |                     |
| (PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL) |        |       |                        |                     |
|                       | INCOME | TRADE | DOMESTIC<br>INVESTMENT | DOMESTIC<br>SAVINGS |
| POOREST 20%           | 1.40   | 0.95  | 1.25                   | 0.99                |
| SECOND 20%            | 1.85   | 1.35  | 2.62                   | 2.53                |
| THIRD 20%             | 2.30   | 2.53  | 2.92                   | 2.89                |
| FOURTH 20%            | 11.75  | 13.94 | 12.65                  | 13.39               |
| RICHEST 20%           | 82.70  | 81.23 | 80.56                  | 80.51               |

TABLE 3

DISPARITY BETWEEN RICH AND POOR COUNTRIES AND BETWEEN RICH AND POOR PEOPLE, 1988

| COUNTRIES*                                       |                                      |                               | PEOPLE**           |                                      |                               |
|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
|                                                  | PER CAPITA INCOME<br>(US\$ BILLIONS) | PERCENTAGE OF<br>TOTAL INCOME |                    | PER CAPITA INCOME<br>(US\$ BILLIONS) | PERCENTAGE OF<br>TOTAL INCOME |
| POOREST 20%                                      | 304                                  | 1.0                           | POOREST 20%        | 183                                  | 0.5                           |
| RICHEST 20%                                      | 19,542                               | 87.8                          | RICHEST 20%        | 22,808                               | 79.0                          |
| RICHEST TO POOREST                               | 65 TO 1                              |                               | RICHEST TO POOREST | 140 TO 1                             |                               |
| * BASED ON AVERAGE NATIONAL PER CAPITA INCOME    |                                      |                               |                    |                                      |                               |
| ** BASED ON INCOME DISTRIBUTION WITHIN COUNTRIES |                                      |                               |                    |                                      |                               |
| UNDP, 1992:38.                                   |                                      |                               |                    |                                      |                               |

An increasing number of people are not only poor but also characterised by a feeling of hopelessness. Poor people are destroyed by the conviction of uselessness and no economic growth can compensate for these losses of human resources. It is imperative to offer the poor a vision of hope and to give them back a sense of human dignity.

### III. Local culture and indigenous rights

While development has been almost synonymous to economic growth, the most important elements have been forgotten: people and culture. The UN launched (in Montreal, Canada, in December 1988) *The World decade for Cultural Development* (1988-1997) under the aegis of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Therefore, we are becoming more aware of the human element in the development equation and of people's participation in development activities.

The concept of indigenous knowledge (local knowledge, specific to a certain place or culture developed by local people and passed down through the society over generations) is becoming recognized. Indigenous knowledge contrast with *modern, western, international, scientific or exogenous* knowledge, generated through formal education. While International knowledge is systematic, value-free and not bound to culture, indigenous knowledge is location specific, value-laden and closely related to local culture.

Indigenous knowledge is central to participation because people make decisions based on their own experience. Development activities, imposed from outside technology without considering local knowledge cannot be participative. Indigenous knowledge and sustainability are intertwined; therefore indigenous knowledge should be used to promote participatory development (Mundy, 1993: 3).

"The only chance for the survival of mankind in our civilisation is for the West to give up its project

of cultural domination and to recognize that it can learn as much, if not more, from cultures it destroys... There are many ways to define what is good so the West cannot claim to be the only one who knows how to define it" (Larouche, 1986).

### IV. Education

"What is education? It is the transmission of ideas which enable people to choose between one thing and another, or, to live a life which is something above meaningless tragedy or inward disgrace" (Schumacher, 1973: 70). It also means drawing out skills rather than pushing in information. For lots of people it still means a tool for survival.

According to UN statistics there are 960 million adults who are illiterate, 2/3 of which are women, and 130 million children who are not enrolled in primary school, 70% are girls.

In the past, priority has been given to male education from the richer section of the population, so assistance in education was concentrated at the higher level, giving better and higher education to a small percentage of the population, leaving the vast majority completely illiterate.

Today, primary education must be given to the majority of the population. If priority must be made, through lack of funding, it should be given to girls. Since women are overrepresented among the poor, investing in women and young girl's education is highly compatible with targeted approaches to poverty reduction and will prove to be an excellent strategy for sustainable development in the future.

For example, female education lowers fertility and slows population growth. Educated women desire fewer children and are better able to have their desired family size. Family planning programs reduce fertility more when combined with female education, especially in countries that have low female secondary enrolments. There is a direct link between education and fertility, the more education a woman has the less children she will have.

In Morocco, the school participation rate of rural girls increase by 55 percent when the household (male) head's education increases from none to primary level- but by 135 percent when the (female) spouse's education changes from none to primary level (World Bank, 1994: 12). In Brazil, uneducated women have on average 6,5 children while educated women have only 2,5 children (FNUP, 1994: 4).

### V. Democracy

New structures must replace the repressive dictatorial ineffective and corrupt systems of state control.

Democracy cannot be prescribed, does not fall from heaven but must be learned over time. After years of dictatorship and power concentration by

minorities at the price of misery and oppression for majorities, reintroduction of human rights are essential for a multi-party system to flourish (Klee, 1993: 61)

This process, which only started recently in most African countries, is also shaking the old concepts of development. In Africa, for instance, development came soon after colonialism, along with 30 years of dictatorship. But by looking closely at both concepts, development can easily be described as neocolonialism.

Freedom to shape opinions and free speech must be restored at all levels of the society. Democratic behaviour patterns and contents as well as consciousness must be conveyed and taught. However, Western models cannot be pressed upon African societies. Democracy can be initiated from above but it must take the time necessary to grow from below. Decentralisation is a key word; patience, hope, faith in the process, encouragement and organization will lead to success.

### VI. Gender equality

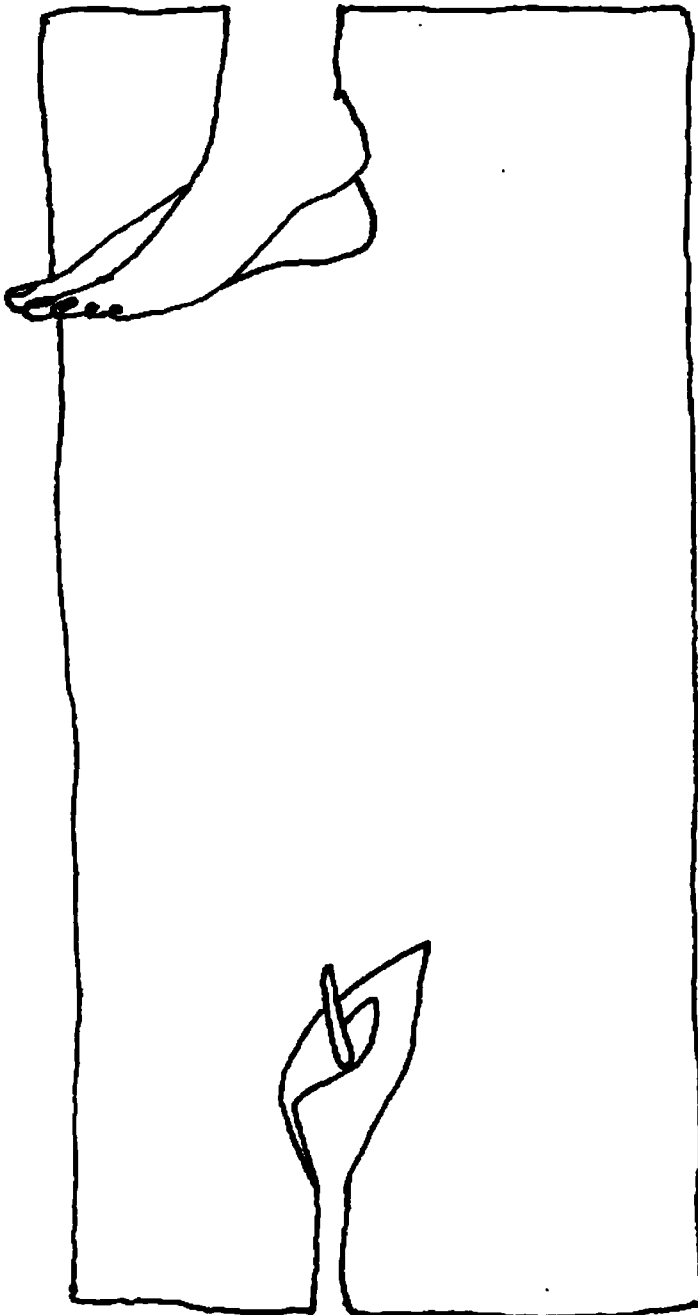
The economy and the labour force have been dominated by men in the past, while women have always been the economic pillar of each society. Equality of sex is a fundamental right necessary to economic growth.

Enhancing women's participation in economic development and investing in women, produce major social returns to development.

Since women's income-generating activities compete with child-bearing and child care, increases in women's formal labour force participation are associated with lower family size more than increases in men's participation rates. In Brazil and Colombia, where labour force participation rates and earnings for men and women have been converging, there have also been sharp declines in fertility.

Education, improved health, and access to income-generating activities for women do much to lower infant mortality and to improve child nutrition and survival. Even for a poor country with a GDP per capita of \$ 300 U.S., a doubling of female secondary school enrollments (from 10 percent to 20 percent) would, controlling for all other factors, reduce the infant mortality rate from 105 deaths per 1,000 live births to 78 (World Bank, 1994: 8).

Improving women's health improves the health of children and other family members. For example, about 24 million infants are born each year at low birth weights, due to their mothers' malnutrition during pregnancy, and about 5 million of these



children die before reaching the age of five (World Bank, 1994: 8).

According to the UN Department of Public Information Statistics, world-wide women occupy just 3.5 percent of all cabinet-level position. In developing countries this ranges from 1.6 percent in Asia and the Pacific to 2.5 percent in Africa and 4.0 percent Latin America. Their rate of representation is even lower in the key political and economic ministerial posts.

## VII. Population

The world population is approaching 5.7 billion. By the end of this century, the total population will likely reach 6.2 billion. Every year, the world's population increases by about 94 million. Most of the world's population growth, 96%, occurs in developing countries; over half of which is in the Indian sub-continent and Africa, where they are the least prepared to face the consequences of this phenomenon on the resources.

The rapid population growth of the past is today stimulating both urban explosion and international migration. The poverty belts are growing larger around each capital city everywhere.

Looking still further ahead, by 2050 the UN's low projection shows a world of 7.8 billion people, and the high projection shows a world of 12.5 billion people.

Population growth must become manageable when human security is assured, access to employment with adequate income, education and health. Population must be controlled in order to improve the living conditions of the vast majority of people.

## VIII. Global, human security

To have real security, people have to feel secure themselves, so security must be looked at in human terms. The following should be key indicators: food, job and income security; respect for human rights; ethnic, racial and religious tolerance; social equality peace and the elimination of the threat of war or armed conflict; protection from crime and the threat of violence. The UN summit for Social Development (in Denmark, March 1995) addressed each of these issues.

Security is a necessary condition for development to occur and sustainable human development is essential for global human security to materialize. Security and development have until recently been dealt with separately; now they must be considered closely related.

"Human security is a child that did not die, a disease that did not spread, an ethnic violence that did not explode, a dissident who was not silenced, a human spirit that was not crushed. Human security is not a concern with weapons. It is a concern with human dignity" (Mahbub, 1994).

In the concept of the Cold War there was no way the concept of human rights could be defended internationally. Now, there is a growing concern about human security as the Cold War is receding. It is increasingly recognized that the conflicts of the future may be between people rather than between nations. Threats to global human security may emerge from travel of global poverty in unpleasant forms: drugs, pollution, illegal migration, terrorism. Soldiers in uniform are no substitute for socio-economic processes, and money spent in socio-economic development can avoid spending money on military intervention.

## IX. New strategies for a sustainable development

People must come first. The principle of Human Centered Development must be adopted, whereby the people of a society increase their personal and institutional capacities to mobilize and manage resources to produce sustainable improvements in their quality of life.

- Development, if meaningful, must be for people by people, so it must be evaluated in terms of people's social, cultural, political as well as economic rights. It can only be achieved through a process of growth involving the whole population.

- Strong families with moral values are more sustainable than economic growth, they will build strong societies, rich and poor. Human resources are a better investment than any other resources, as all natural resources will be wasted if the people are not capable of using them.

- New principles should be based on moral values, human rights, education, discipline, self-reliance, justice and participation.

Partnership has to become, the new principle by which we deal and collaborate with other countries.

- The concept of assistance was never equitable nor just or even human in some cases, and can never be. We cannot assume that what is good for the rich must be good for the poor.

- Development must be addressed with principles based on the dignity of human life, not on the productivity, but on the human choices and not just on GNP.

- A new framework for global human development beyond just aid for the poor and weak nations is

needed as well as a real global commitment to peace; as peace is a condition for sustainable development.

- Education of the female population will lead very quickly to a steady-state of sustainable world population. In Bangladesh, the Grameen Bank, by encouraging self employment of women is proving to be a self-directed and targeted poverty reduction strategy.

- The preamble of the Charter of the UN stated, 50 years ago, the values needed in order to start a New Era in International Relations "...the people of the UN are determined to practise tolerance, to live in peace with their neighbours, to employ International machinery for the promotion of economic and social advancement of the people".

### Conclusion

The moral values of our societies are disappearing along with the decline of religious beliefs, or the moral values are changing and taking new forms along with the new definitions of families, societies and development for the 21st century.

There will always be rich and poor people, but the new mandate should be the elimination of extreme wealth and extreme poverty, the gap between rich and poor must stop growing. Development agencies and governments do not use the terminology of moral values, but rather the terminology of the economists or the scientists. However, moral and spiritual values must fit into the new development paradigm and development agencies must deal with human values in order to become more accountable.

The issues of development are not only numerous but they are linked. By addressing one of them, and reduction of poverty must be the highest on the agenda, several major issues will be addressed.

The actual situation of the world, despite the alarming statistics, provides an historical opportunity for women's advancement if it can force a rethinking of approaches to development. More women at decision making positions will fasten the process of peace, they do not want to loose their husbands and sons in wars, it is a fact of life.

Technological knowledge should be used to the advancement of civilisation, for common interest, International peace and security and to promote social progress for the majority. Finally, science should be at the service of humanity and not the other way around.

So what will make a break through? In the past, people expressing opinions based on moral values were considered to be naive but we must be committed to them, as they are part of life. Now the

pendulum is swinging back, as every thing else is breaking apart and there is no indication or hope, from the past 30 years, to suggest that we can alleviate poverty.

"Now indeed seems the time to get fully engaged in one last, possibly grand, but certainly well-thought-out effort in which all are profitably involved, lest all should be ignominiously consumed" (Culpepper, 1992: 42).

This is the essence of the challenge we are globally facing at the threshold of the 21st century. ♦

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