

THE HUMAN AND CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF DEVELOPMENT:
ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND NEGLECTS

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It is a pleasure and an honor to be here at this 25th World Conference of the Society for International Development. We are here to reflect on the global village that may emerge from the increasingly complex interdependencies, but which also may not emerge, if we look at the growing asymmetry of those interdependencies, and the rapid fragmentation, rediffusion of power and explosions of raw violence in the world. But more particularly we are also here to ponder what its present conditions offer us by way of lessons about the first 25 years of development experience.

Perhaps the most sobering and relevant truth that we can take away from this conference will be the recognition that development defined as the endeavor towards a managed transformation of society, has been an important, but only one among many other factors that have determined the present state of the human condition. For we cannot in good conscience assess the accomplishments and failures of two and a half development decades without taking into account the overall historical setting of war, revolution and social and political upheaval, that has characterised this quarter of a century, and within which the development effort has taken place.

We should realize that in the Third World alone, there have been more than 100 wars since the end of World War II. Apart from outright war, many Third World societies have been rent by serious domestic conflict, along, but also across class, ethnic, religious or ideological lines of division, resulting both from the destabilizing impact of development and from the absence of development.

In the process we have witnessed the complete polarisation of societies and the mindless escalation of sometimes blind and sometimes calculated violence, the collapse of political institutions, of political systems and even the wholesale destruction of the social fabric of a society. We have also seen processes emerge that have led more generally to the militarisation of many societies. The rapid rise in arms purchases is only one manifestation of this. But in all cases the human, social and cultural cost has been tremendous. In part all this has been the result of processes of change, in the initiation of which governments may have played some role, but in the subsequent evolution of which, they have had little control. These almost autonomous processes have to do with population increase and the resultant pressure on resources and employment; with growing access to information through education, communication and exposure, directly or vicariously, to other life-styles, leading to higher expectations, profound value changes and higher levels of political consciousness.

In fact one major feature of the period under consideration has been the growing self-assertiveness in almost all parts of the developing world of the traditionally powerless, and of those marginalised by development and modernisation, and their political awakening. It is no exaggeration to state that in many different ways, the little people are now on the move. In some cases they have simply moved up the economic development ladder; in other their rise has been accompanied by conflict and met with violence. But their heightened expectations and their refusal to continue to accept their lot has also led to massive population movement-urbanisation and migration within and across national boundaries and even across continental divides. We are now living in a world whose peoples are in an even more literal sense, on the move, willingly, or unwillingly, as a matter of government policy, on a scale unprecedented in time and scope. In Asia alone, accepting only the more conservative estimates of internal and international migrants in recent years, some 50 million people are involved. We have among us a veritable "nation of migrants" with a population larger than all but six Asian countries. Around the world, upwards of 16 million refugees of war, oppression and natural disaster are adrift. An additional 20 million workers, by some estimates, are in jobs outside their home countries. In the face of the immense magnitude of these often violent social, political and historical convulsions, and the unbelievable scale of human suffering, despair and rage but also of heightened religious intensity, the development-planners and practitioners often stand powerless and speechless in the realization that the development effort to which he is committed is one and only one of the many interacting forces of change of such unsuspected power in his society. Gone are the early naive illusions of development as an endeavor in social engineering towards a brave new world. Multiple goals have replaced the initial single focus. There is now a greater understanding for the profound interaction between international and national factors in the development process and an increasing emphasis on people, on human beings and the human potential as the basis, the means and the ultimate purpose of the development effort. Nevertheless, it should also be recognized despite all the glaring inadequacies of present more sophisticated strategies and methods, and the general underestimation of the power of the forces at work, international development still constitutes one of the most noble efforts of humankind in the second half of this century to create a more humane global community.

My particular charge here today is to try to evaluate the human and cultural dimension of development over the past 25 years, noting accomplishments and neglects, presumably in order to draw some lessons for our future work. Drawing up a balance sheet of accomplishments and failures of cultural development policies by using the conventional cultural and social indicators will not do the job, for they do not lead us to what I sense to be the central problems in this area.

To illustrate, the tremendous increase in school enrollment in the Third World should of course be entered in the ledger against the growth in absolute numbers of illiterates the world over. What is however equally significant - and here we move off the balance sheet - is that these figures of educational expansion tell us little about the long term impact of the kind of educational experience provided, on those millions of Third World children. The statistics do not tell us how well their education prepares them for their life situations,

or the degree to which, because of its generally urban bias, modern education has contributed to the cultural impoverishment, cultural discontinuities and alienation in the countryside, and to the present anomic behavior of so many of the young. Likewise, in many places considerable proliferation of cultural facilities in the rural as well as the urban areas has apparently not had any significant impact on reducing the pressures towards urbanisation.

Weighing the larger number of women in the registered labor force in urban areas against the loss of income for women in the countryside as a result of the modernization of agriculture, does not say much about the degree and structures of exploitation, deprivation and despair of those women.

Similarly, the expansion of higher education has - with some notable exceptions - not led to the significant scientific or technological innovations that could lead the way to a more autonomous trajectory of development and industrialization. This may in part have to do with the lack of interest of economic planners in the development of basic science capabilities in their countries, maybe also with too instrumentalistic a view of knowledge and culture, but also because of the lack of interest or even hostility on the part of the political leadership in providing the political space - the essential precondition - for the flowering of science, experimentation, innovation or simply for new ideas and synthesis: i.e. academic freedom.

To give you just one more illustration. In those countries which have opted for a national language, rather than the one of their former colonizer, in many cases only very inadequate efforts have been made to make modern science more accessible and capable of taking root in the intellectual mainstream of the country, through a massive translation program, and through developing the national language into an effective vehicle for modern scientific communication. More surprising, but equally disturbing, has been the fact that neither the "basic needs" nor the "development from below" concepts have drawn the implications for the use and development of minority languages as vehicles for such a development dynamics, and for the expression of social and technological creativity at the local level. These neglected issues in turn, of course, do open a Pandora's box of questions that have to do with the capacity of a society continuously to adjust the sensitive balance between the requirements for national unity and the fuller and more equitable involvement of minorities in national life and in the development process as active participants in the decision-making process as well as beneficiaries of development. And finally, in many languages the hierarchy of terms of address, and other such factors have been a major instrument in the perpetuation of the inferior status of women, and should have received a much greater attention in language development policies.

Dealing with questions like changes in the position of women, ambivalent at best for those in the middle class, and definitely negative for those among the urban and rural poor, questions like changes in attitudes towards work and gainful employment, but also questions like the impact of family planning on the family and on attitudes towards female babies born to already large families in some cultures, on dietary habits and notions about health, all affecting traditional concepts of family-life should no longer be weighed in isolation, but together with the traumatic impact of massive migration and urbanisation on family life, concepts of family, and on the large number of

single heads of households coping with old as well as new problems.

In drawing up a balance sheet on human rights, the easy way - and many have taken that path - would be to list countries on a scale of so-called human rights performance. It is of course of the utmost importance to establish a floor below which violations of human rights invite international expressions of opprobrium or sanctions. Still, we should also realize that quite often violations of human rights are manifestations of failure to manage the drive for economic growth together with the structural changes necessary to broaden the social base of the development process and to come to grips with the causes of endemic poverty. And many among the countries who sit in self-righteous judgement cannot and should not avoid sharing the responsibility for these terrible events for not helping to develop more effective and more comprehensive theories for the democratic management of structural transformation in development. In fact many major institutions of higher learning in the first world, the alma maters of many third world leaders and developers, seem to have lost interest in the search for development theories that reconcile the often conflicting requirements of freedom and those of governance, after the collapse of the first generation of political institutions patterned after the Western models of democratic government, leaving many of us in the Third World with a keen sense of abandonment. For in truth, no balance sheet can in any way reflect the bitter fact that after the attainment of national independence, many of our countries have lost their freedom, leaving us with the gnawing suspicion that our patterns of development may have contributed to that loss.

And what, in addition to what has been said about human rights, is there to be said when governments, for ideological or other reasons of political or economic convenience, have gotten into the business of expelling minorities on a massive scale, or of exporting their labor force without assuming responsibility for their conditions of work in the receiving countries, while at the same time other governments, often signatories to the Helsinki agreements stating the right to leave one's country, are engaged in efforts to keep these unfortunate people bottled up in their own countries which they want to leave because of untenable conditions? Such are some of the ironies and perplexities when one looks at the human and cultural dimensions of the development experience so far.

Twenty-five years of development experience seem to suggest then that beyond the conventional cultural policies and related cultural and social indicators there lies a host of insufficiently explored cultural factors that bear on a society's response to modernisation, on the often alternating choices between isolation and openness, on a society's capacity to maintain national and social solidarity and cohesiveness in the face of major social, cultural and structural changes, upsetting sensitive traditional social and political equilibriums and on a society's need to see its evolution and its capacity to incorporate innovation, science and technology in ways that are in consonance with its own sense of moral purpose.

Our concern with the human and social dimensions of development should therefore pay a great deal more attention to its interaction with the massive and powerful and almost autonomous dynamics of social change at the national

and at the international level, but also to the pervasive influence of traditional notions of power and meaning on development, its institutions, and on the concept of the state and its role and transformation in the development effort. Our basic failure to reach the poor, to come to grips with poverty, and with the dualistic economy, seem to suggest that the persistent low priority in development planning and implementation accorded to the countryside, the persistent bias in favour of the center and the urban areas, but also the way in which so-called modern political and developmental institutions often become simply new bottles for essentially the old wine of traditional power relations, is not only a function of the dominant interests of the elite, but has also to do with the centrality and pervasiveness of the traditional political culture, traditional concepts of power, social order and hierarchy.

These determine the perceived propriety of relations between the governing and the governed, between men and women, and between state and society. They explain a great deal about the difficulties in turning an essentially law and order and tax-collecting colonial bureaucracy, paternalistic at best, exploitative at worst, into a developmental, public service, emancipatory type of bureaucracy. Modern training in development administration with its emphasis on efficiency and effectiveness has tended to strengthen deeply rooted colonial and pre-colonial patrimonial notions about the official's relationship to the public, and has strengthened their disinclination to accept the legitimacy and importance of people's participation, self-management and self-reliance as essential vehicles for development.

The simple question of assessing the accomplishments and neglects of 25 years of development experience has led us far afield. It has become clear, I hope, that such an assessment only makes sense if conducted in the context of the major convulsions that have marked this period. It has also become obvious that simply drawing up a balance sheet of achievements and failures of cultural development policies may have only limited usefulness, and does not significantly add to our understanding of the dynamics of macro-social and cultural change and the formulation of more meaningful concepts of development. That will require a clearer understanding of the setting of the almost autonomous processes of socio-cultural change within which the development effort in the narrow sense is made, and with which it interacts.

Secondly, of the interaction, complex and large scale, between the national development effort and a rapidly changing international environment. And thirdly, of the impact of the strength and pervasiveness of cultural tradition on the institutions and processes of modernisation.

This realisation takes us way beyond the notion of development as an endeavor in social engineering, towards an inquiry into the dynamics of the historical processes of societal transformation in different cultures, of alternating waves of self-chosen isolation and openness, of the possibility of growing dysfunctionality and irrelevance of cultures or their capacity to adjust while maintaining a sense of cultural continuity through a growing endogenous capacity for cultural reinterpretation, redefinition and self-renewal.

This brings us in the middle of the ongoing global debate about the eternal tension and mutual interpenetration between modernity and tradition,

about the "end of modernity" and "the return of the sacred", about secular and the transcendental conceptions of life and the place of science and technology in them.

Against this background the assessment in its broadest terms, of the human and cultural dimensions of the development experience so far, assumes an added significance in that it may provide pointers to the larger question, i.e. whether out of the present turmoil in the world, through different trajectories of development and industrialisation, dictated by an unprecedented combination of demographic pressures, poverty and high energy costs, in a number of poor, large and populous countries there may not, in the longer term, arise a variety of non-western, modern civilisations, side by side with that of the West, in a condition of rough parity with it, but rooted in Islamic, Confucian, Hindu and other cultures, in a culturally pluralistic, more equitable and peaceful international order.

One final point needs to be made. Both the successes and failures of 25 years of development experience have also shown that the organized pursuit of material improvement does not automatically bring in its wake freedom, human dignity, justice and civility. These values have in fact often fallen victim to the development endeavor, even when the provision of basic services includes access to education and legal protection.

We should not forget that a zoo also is a place in which the basic needs of its inhabitants are met. Unless freedom, human rights, equity for women, respect for the rights of children, and the right freely to organize, for the rich and powerful as well as for the poor and the weak, are made independent goals of the development effort together with explicit strategies for democratic structural change that would enable people to liberate themselves from the oppressive social structures which perpetuate their dependency and their powerlessness, there is little hope that the cultural goods and values that make up a humane society can grow. It is only such societies that have the resilience, the capacity for autonomous creativity and innovation, and for the continuous redefinition and self-renewal essential to their survival in a crowded, competitive and rapidly changing world, that flow from the pride, the sense of identity and ultimate faithfulness to the sense of moral purpose and meaning that are embedded in the deep structure of their cultures.

It can be said that one of the major problems that lie at the heart of the development process is how to keep the disparities that inevitably arise within the ethical or ideological bounds that prevail within a given culture. Failure to include these values as goals and guideposts in the development effort co-equal with economic growth, would make these disparities unmanageable and would make it impossible to deal with the sense of powerlessness, and moral outrage that has fuelled the revolutions, the violent convulsions and the cultural and religious backlash of such power and intensity as we have witnessed in the last 25 years.

It is therefore not enough to assess the effectiveness, or lack of it, of cultural policies that are designed to "overcome" so-called cultural obstacles to development, or to meet the requirements for economic growth.

It is the flowering of these intangible but essential assets that needs the deliberate creation of the political space and the underlying social

structures that together constitute the human and cultural conditions within which societal growth takes place, that constantly need to be monitored and addressed. And this takes us beyond the conventional social and cultural indicators that we associate with the so-called "quality of life".

The same holds true for international development. With growing interdependence it is no longer possible for any nation to safeguard its security, to secure its national interests and pursue its developmental goals in isolation. The control of the destructive capacity of nations, threatening all of us, the persistence of large scale poverty that degrades the poor and the rich alike and that denies the humanity of each and all of us, the resort to random or systematic violence brutalizing whole societies and the violation of human rights - in whatever way defined - resulting from the incapacity to deal with poverty, equity and justice, has become a common concern and responsibility, even though each of us may respond differently.

The common survival of humanity in civility on this limited earth, in an international system in which no single nation or group of nations is in control, but which is also affected by a general sense of uncertainty and limits, by despair and even rage of millions of people, but also by new hopes, rooted in passionately held moral and religious convictions, will require unprecedented levels of mutual understanding and tolerance and much higher levels of international and people-to-people cooperation than ever before.

Our groping for the capabilities and instrumentalities to achieving this reflects the stages of our learning to see and treat the human race, in all its diversity as a single unit of civilized life of which we are all an indispensable part.

Interdependence, however assymetrical, forces us to see our own problems of survival and development also in global terms, and to search for local and global solutions to these problems that are mutually compatible.

The first steps in that learning process have already been taken. The World Bank's annual report on international development; the report on the state of the environment, on population, on the military balance and other reports, do help us to monitor both progress and regression in these areas, to identify problems to be addressed and to suggest ways of dealing with them.

What is missing is a humanistic assessment of these data, and evaluation or interpretation, or interpretations of their implications for the human and cultural dimensions of the development of each of our societies and of humankind and its succeeding generations as a whole.

It would help us to determine whether - and to what extent - we are on the road to self-destruction, to the peaceful antlike society of 1984, or to a more viable humane, diverse and dynamic global community. It would also help to measure ourselves against our perceptions of ourselves as human beings, against the values by which we define our cultural identity in the value-configurations specific to each nation in making the difficult choice and

trade-offs in our responses to intractable old problems and the new challenges of a world in process of rapid but profound transformation. Such assessment would also force each of us to ponder their implications for the meaning of life individually and collectively.

Collectively such periodic assessments would make explicit the different interpretations emerging from different schools of thought, and different cultural and ideological perspectives, which in turn could lead to the kind of communications on which mutual understanding on a global scale, human solidarity and mutual tolerance could be built. Such periodic reports would then contribute to the learning process towards perceiving and treating the world and humankind in all its diversity as a single entity.

It could help monitor the progress, or lack of it, in preparing ourselves for living peacefully, in civility and humanely in a world of 8 billion people with the necessary social, artistic, cultural and management arrangements towards that end.

The UNU is at present exploring the desirability and feasibility of such a periodic, and possibly an annual report on the "STATE OF THE HUMAN CONDITION". I hope that you will find this idea of sufficient interest and importance, to elicit your advice, your support and eventually your participation.

I thank you.