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## DEVELOPMENT FOR WHAT? - FALSE GODS AND HOLY WRIT

Antony Allott

Years ago (1964 to be exact) I contributed to a symposium published in the United States and entitled "Development - for What?". I always felt that the best feature of this symposium was its title, and the challenge it posed. The fact that my own contribution to it concerned "The African conception of the Rule of Law" shows how widely development was apparently conceived. And yet the presuppositions, not just of the contributors to this symposium but of most subsequent writers and doers in the field, have been that development is basically about economic development. Even such sceptics as Peter Bauer appear to take it for granted that development is about economic development:

I use interchangeably the terms material advance, material progress and economic development. The former expressions are more appropriate than economic development, as they do not suggest that material progress depends on factors which economists are especially qualified or even uniquely qualified, to analyse or promote.<sup>1</sup>

Fortunately, Bauer recognises that economic development does not occur in isolation, because he goes immediately afterwards to redeem his position somewhat:

Moreover, the reference to material advance and material progress may help to indicate that economic development is but one aspect of the total historical evolution of societies and one which, for many purposes of analysis and policy, is inseparable from other elements of social life.<sup>2</sup>

But he does not go far enough, as far as this present paper advocates, to ask what development is for.

"By their deeds ye shall know them". It is not by the declarations of development experts and development planners, but by what they do, that we may judge what they think their task to be. If you scrutinize the pages of practical development journals, you will find that most projects described relate in some form, directly or otherwise, to the material betterment of the life of the people in the "underdeveloped", or "less developed" countries. Even education and family planning programmes, to mention two popular examples of apparently non-economic action areas, are seen as pre-conditions to economic development, rather than the other way round. Achievement of rapid economic growth is one of the main aims of "development", to which must be sacrificed the intangibles which go to make up life in society. It is, then, a "false

god", in so far as it seduces its worshippers from contemplation of the true and more distant goal. Similarly, there is largely a consensus among development experts, codified in UN documents and in the literature, about the classification of the world's peoples with respect to development. This body of doctrine constitutes a sort of "Holy Writ", dissent from which attracts the full attention of the scholarly Holy Inquisition.

We are now being asked to consider the relationship of law and development and the right to development in the national and international contexts. Is this "right to development" a new god whose image has recently been erected, or is it merely a re-affirmation of what has, since the Second World War, been a fundamental axiom of international relations? Or, more suggestively and in my view more acceptably, is it a fundamental axiom of human life in society viewed, not from the collectivist but from the individualist standpoint? We cannot hope to achieve a practical realisation of our development aims, whatever they may be, through the instrument of law and in the language of rights, unless we have a clear notion of what we intend by "development" in the first place. So much is obvious.

#### The meaning of "development".

Too often and unthinkingly, development is defined as "economic development", i.e. an expansion or growth in resources. We can agree that there is a distinction, not always easy to draw, between economic growth and economic development. Indeed, one of the more successful critical books about the Liberian economy was entitled "Growth without development". What appears to be intended by the distinction is that a mere increase in the indices of production, of consumption, of energy use, of whatever factor we choose, does not necessarily mean a permanent lifting up of the curve on the graph, where the curve represents people's experiences of economic benefit rather than the planner's figures of production. Nor does expansion of these factors by itself guarantee a qualitative change at the structural level in those aspects of the economic system which help to determine whether the economy is soundly based and whether it has further possibilities of development: "more does not necessarily mean better".

It is a pity that so many developmental thinkers tend to have an economic background and thus to wear the blinkers of their professionalism. While it is true that many items in the programme of changing life for the better require resources, and often additional resources, such resources are mere means to defined goals or ends, and not ends in themselves. Building a theatre is not development; development means expanding one's horizons by using that theatre for entertainment and expression of one's talents. This simple example brings out another point, that there is often an obsession with

structures rather than with the individual for whom the structures exist and who alone can give such structures meaning. Confusion of means and ends; structural change rather than individual development; a purely economic view of life: these are some of the common weaknesses of the development professionals.

By way of contrast, I see development as the enhancement of life and of life possibilities for the ordinary individual, not merely his betterment in a strictly economic, still less a purely statistical sense. The long-term aim is not merely to conserve, but to improve, the lot of the individual in society. Put like that, there would seem to be no upward limit to developmental ambitions. But reality imposes a whole series of strictly limited targets. If King Henry IV of France could in the 16th century have as his developmental ambition that

"I want there to be no peasant in my kingdom so poor that he cannot have a chicken in his pot every Sunday,"

we can accept that this ambition has been fully recognized by the 20th century for his and other European countries; but the taking in of sufficient protein for healthy life is still an unrealisable ambition in many African countries. Economic goods are mere instruments to a better life, but by themselves neither sufficient nor necessary for a happy life. The goal for the individual is thus as much social and psychological as it is economic. Education, to take one typical and avidly sought-after good, needs resources for its expansion, but by itself does not necessarily yield life-enhancement or personal satisfaction. It all depends on the kind of education, and the purposes to which it can be put.

On this view of what is meant by development, one immediate and startling conclusion emerges. There is no country in the world whose inhabitants can confidently say, "we have no further need for development", meaning: "there is nothing further that can be done to enhance the life of individual citizens in our state". The mere assertion is grotesque. In my own country, Britain, despite its vast increases in social welfare in the last century, the existence of universal education, the fact that no one need now starve or go without a home, and so on, every individual could rightly claim that he or she had a personal agenda of life-enhancement which could be implemented if given the necessary equipment, opportunities and assistance.

This is not at all the same as to say that economic growth is still desirable and possible in the "developed" industrialised countries. Finite resources impose strict ceilings on the upward expansion of economic activity. There will come a time, maybe soon, when the built-in assumptions about growth cease to have validity. But life-enhancement can still go on.

In the result, all countries are "developing", except that this suggests an ineluctable process of nature rather than a consciously intended programme; all countries are developable, in other words. "Undeveloped" will not do, then; nor will "underdeveloped", because it suggests a norm or standard which cannot be defined, and which no one has authority to define. "Less developed" seems less objectionable; but, and it is a most important but, it incorporates the worship of the false economic god by implication. What a "less developed country" has less of is not things like opera houses, or opportunities for individuals to enjoy themselves or develop their talents; the measure is that it has a smaller GNP per head, or fewer roads. It is true that the statisticians cannot find quantitative measures to gauge the degree of development in this less definable sense, so they restrict themselves to economic measures. But by doing so they subscribe to the great self-deception that what cannot be quantified has no value. "What cannot be counted does not count."

#### The purpose of development.

To ask, "for what is development?", is not enough: the question really includes the subsidiary question, "for whom is development?". We can distinguish between immediate and ultimate goals. Immediate goals include the provision of infra-structures, the expansion of monetary resources, the exploitation of assets. Ultimate goals are for the enhancement of life and life possibilities for the individual in society. Governments do not often see the task like this. Their approach is conditioned by their underlying political and social philosophy but there is a surprising convergence between governments of different political tendencies. The command, socialist, dirigiste type of state finds that development philosophies are congenial to it, if and in so far as development is seen as something imposed in the interests of the collectivity from above and on its subjects. The goal in such a government's eyes is the maximisation of various factors, outputs or structural provisions, be these agricultural production, factory output or kilometres of roads built. So far from the idea that development ought to contribute to the betterment of life for the individuals currently living in that society, some governments adopt the philosophy that development may mean a forced worsening of life in the present in the interests of a hypothetical improvement of life in some future century. The question, "Development - for what?", is thus answered by them as: "for future generations, but not for now". The result of such philosophies is a distancing of governmental development policy from the people it should otherwise be serving.

In theory the situation should be greatly different in the more liberal free-market societies; but a similar manipulation of people in the interest of some larger macro-economic goal can be observed in such societies too. There is a strong element of dirigisme even in so-called

free enterprise or capitalist societies. Thus a very strong element of economic engineering dominated the thinking of the East Africa Royal Commission, and later influenced the land consolidation programme in Kenya. By opting for an individualist solution to development needs, the aim of the planners was not merely to foster growth, but to foster demand as the lead factor in the stimulation of economic activity. Needs had to be created where they did not exist before; in other words, dissatisfaction was seen as an important mechanism in the encouragement of the individual towards a more productive (in western terms) future. Whether the stimulation of demands and the creation of needs necessarily increase individual happiness is a question worth debating; but few economists discuss development in terms of happiness. The "Quality of Life Index", now favoured by some as a measure of development, takes three significant parameters (significant only because quantifiable) as indicative of the quality of life in a given society. But this does not in fact measure the quality of life, merely the quantity of certain measures. We should abandon the QLI in favour of a GFI, or "General Felicity Index", which, despite its echoes of Benthamite utilitarianism, surely expresses what governments should be seeking to achieve, viz. the maximising, taken over the whole society, of individual felicity. Such a measure can be seen as the obverse, the flip side, of the social justice coin.

Of course, if you don't accept that the aim, not just of development planning but of government in general, is the maximising of individual felicity, and adopt instead some variant of the centralist and collectivist thesis, then the preceding paragraph will have little appeal. But, in the latter alternative, one may legitimately ask, what is government for? There is no doubt what governments, of whatever persuasion, say they are for: all agree in saying that they exist for the benefit of those they rule. Unfortunately, however, discussion of government, and of development too, often has a high hypocrisy quotient, where governments, and individual commentators, often say one thing and do another. They say that development is to make the lot of the people better; but the declarations of governments which say this and improve the lot of their peasants by, say, grinding them down with taxes or even shooting them, attract little credence. If development is seen, not as a continuing process and one where the aim is to improve the lot of the individual, but as something commanded and imposed from above, then it will engage the support of those who wield the levers of power centrally, and they will wield these levers with scant regard to the declared aims which they purport to espouse.

In asking what development is for, what its purpose is, we are being required in effect to strike a series of balances, with items in the debit as well as the credit side of the ledger. Development, in the sense of planned development, is likely to encounter the network of social forces represented by culture, religion, world-view, normative systems, and family structures (the list is not exhaustive). How far do governments and those who professionally advise them take into account

the impact of their proposals and projects on these intangibles? They may be seen as obstacles to development, and often are: "if only the people weren't so backward, with their adherence to out-of-date social systems, land tenure, religious beliefs and so on, then we would have no difficulty in implementing our proposals for social or economic development, be they the modernisation of agriculture, the emancipation of women, or whatever!" A cri de coeur. How often, though, do governments and those who professionally advise them draw up a balance-sheet and say: "If we implement this or this proposal, then the people affected stand to lose this or this feature to which they are attached, and to which they attribute value."?

### The right to development.

Who, first, is the right-holder? If, following the assumptions of the development professionals, and of governments, one takes the units of discourse to be states or peoples, viewed as a collectivity, then we are asking whether countries have a right to development, what the content of that right is, and against whom it is held. If one takes the unit of discourse as the individual human being living in society, that he is the primary beneficiary of development, and that development projects, even when they purport to benefit the community, are taken to do so because at the end of the day it is the individual members of that community who are to benefit, then our discussion of the "right to development", of its content and against whom it is held, will come out very differently. This is the aspect which I shall briefly discuss here.

I have explained what I understand by "development". It goes far beyond economics or resources; it extends to the maximisation of happiness via the enhancement of life and life possibilities for the individual, whatever his or her status or position in life. Every human has this right by virtue of being human. A right represents a claim, or in this case a set of claims, against identifiable individuals. It can either be negative or positive. In the narrow sense, a right is attributed by and in a legal system. Clearly here we are not talking about rights in a legal system. We are talking about claims which everyone ought to be able to put forward by virtue of his or her membership of humanity and of a given society, in other words, about "rights" in the natural order, which flow from man's being a social animal. Such "rights" provide a goal and a critique. A goal, in that morally speaking all human systems of law and government should incorporate them as far as possible. A critique, in that their statement allows us to criticise existing systems of law and government to see how far they correspond with these objectives.

My own view of law, and indeed of government, is that it should be "people-centred". Government, in the time-honoured words, should approximate the aim of being by the people, of the people, for the

people. Development similarly. Development, in other words, is for people and not for elite groups. A people-centred view of development means much more than that development should serve the individual's needs. Too often development, and government, are by proxy: those who do it, who engineer it, purport to do so in the best interests of the people, purport to represent the people or to speak for them. Such representativeness is sufficiently dubious in an elective democracy, where the people appear to have chosen their representative; it is dubious unless there is a continuous and real dialogue between rulers and ruled, and the views and wishes (not just their assumed needs) of the people, taken singly as well as collectively, determine the policies followed. The claim to be representative, to speak for the people, has even less credibility where there is an unelected or dictatorial government: it is not God, or history, or political ideology which gives a mandate to one group of persons to rule over another, but the voluntary and continuing assent of those who are ruled.

So the right to development is the individual citizen's right; and government, and the procedures for the formulation of development policies and plans, must take account of this fact.

A right is a claim against someone: against whom does the "right to development" in this sense operate? It operates first against governments. Governments have the duty to maximise the felicity and well-being of those they rule. It operates secondly against fellow members of the society. The right to enhancement of life and life possibilities does not, however, authorise a Robin Hood philosophy, still less a general demand for re-distribution of misery. Negatively, it implies that no one else should wittingly and unjustifiably impede each individual's search for life-enhancement. Positively, it implies some variant of social justice policy, the content of which cannot be spelt out here, but which will vary according to one's appreciation of how far the good society should go in the obtaining of social justice.

Do less advantaged individuals in a less advantaged country of, say, the so-called Third World have a claim against more advantaged individuals or more advantaged countries? This brings us into the international dimension of the discussion, which we shall be looking at later. It is just worth reminding ourselves that the dictum, "the poor we have always with us", is true to the extent that the definition of poverty remains relative. Some are always going to be better off than others. By a definition, then, we can make people "poor". Similarly, by a definition we can always retain a pool of less developed or insufficiently advantaged countries or persons.

### Conclusion

I have said nothing about the false gods which the apostles of



development, whether they come from East or West, have tended to worship in their pursuit of the goal of development. Forced industrialisation, whether on the western capitalist plan or the socialist Stalinist model, has proved a major destructive force, as much as the engine of development, in too many countries. The neglect of agriculture and rural development has been shameful. Conspiracy theories, one-cause answers, cannot excuse these failures. But few looking at African economies today (I say nothing of other parts of the world) could deny that many of them are now broken-backed. What development potential they had is exhausted. There has been a steady decline, not a steady improvement, in standards of life and the quality of life. The concept of development almost becomes a mockery in such circumstances. It is no longer a question of enhancing life, but of preventing it from deteriorating still further.

Should one conclude that it has been a hopeless enterprise, sparked by illusion out of the desperate desire to catch up? Is it too much to expect countries to leap centuries in their economic development? There is cause neither for boundless pessimism nor for unrestricted optimism. There have been distinct gains. Thus the delivery of medical services and the availability of education, as well as the avoidance of enslavement and of intertribal warfare, mark out this era from the way things were before the encounter with the West really began. But the picture is not one of gains only: one could argue that the minimum which any competent society should provide for its citizens is that they should have enough to eat and somewhere to live. Traditional societies in Africa, with their principle of community-based access to land and the simplicity of housing built on traditional lines, at least purported to offer these two guarantees. Now more and more African countries announce themselves as incapable of growing enough food to feed their millions, and for too many the quest for a home means a desperate struggle to find a toehold in some urban slum.

The limits of planning; the failures of centrally directed, rather than people-centred, development; the emphasis on industrialisation; the neglect of the rural peasantry; undue reliance on "experts" - all these are topics which arise for discussion when one contemplates the development scene. The construction of appropriate development strategies in implementation of the "right to development" is a worthy and challenging task for the remainder of this century.

FOOTNOTES

1. Peter Bauer, Dissent on Development (1976), 26.
2. Ibid.