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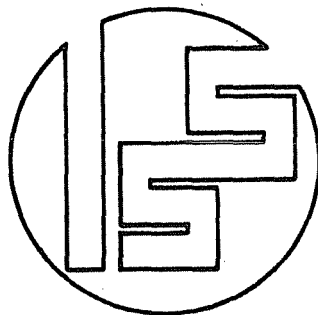
**Developed and Underdeveloped:
a radical view of constructive relationships**

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DEVELOPED AND UNDERDEVELOPED: A RADICAL VIEW OF CONSTRUCTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Avrom Bendavid

There is, particularly in the Western world, a growing wave of self-examination reaching deep into the structure of values that for so long have been taken for granted. Basic premises of life in the industrialized countries are being questioned, and some are coming under serious attack. Among them is the desirability of continued economic expansion, with its inevitably attendant environmental deterioration; heightened complexity and anxiety in the conduct of personal affairs; growing welfare disparities; increasing concentration of power in the hands of managers of economic empires; and increasing specialization upon which economic growth feeds but which leads to an alienation from the natural and social environment, and perhaps ultimately from the self.

In the past few years the development assistance establishment has been undergoing an intensive soul-searching as well, partly influenced by the introspective fashion of the times, but clearly stimulated by a well-founded disappointment with the fruits of its labors over the past two decades or so. Here, too, the most fundamental assumptions are being questioned: Is development to be thought of only in terms of economic growth? What about 'nation-building'? The alleviation of human misery? The distribution of global power? Do the 'developed' countries really have the development knowhow to provide technical assistance uniquely suited to the problems of the 'underdeveloped' countries? Are they really interested in bringing about a world of truly independent developed countries? And more. The discussion has reached the point where the entire question of development assistance is up for re-consideration.

Increasingly, there is recognition of the fact that the societies that have emerged in the affluent countries, and their associated values and life-styles, are merely that - i.e., what has emerged, for better or for worse - and are not necessarily superior to or desirable over possible alternatives.¹ This has vast implications for a reconsideration of constructive relationships between the developed and the underdeveloped.

The Nature of Underdevelopment²

When the missionaries set out to save the souls of peoples with different religious traditions, their objectives could be conceptualized with relative ease. Simply a matter of bringing people from a less desirable state, nonbelief, to a more desirable state, belief manifested in observance of the prescribed code of living and religious rites. To achieve this would require an education to certain attitudes and skills, and provision of the requisite minimal physical facilities.

Development assistance to the Third World, encouraged by the successes of reconstruction aid after World War II, was undertaken with a similar kind of approach. The approach has proven to be much too simplistic, is probably responsible for much of the failure,

and is the source of so much of the confusion over the matter to this day. George Axinn has stated it succinctly: "The assumption was that development, undefined but identified through indicators, mostly economic, proceeds along a uni-dimensional scale; and that all of the world's nation/states - if not the multiple sub-cultures within them - could be rank ordered by some formula from the 'most developed' to the 'least developed'."³ To this should be added that the very choice of the word 'developed' makes clear that value judgements are involved, and that the former is the desired situation, to be sought by 'less developed' peoples. Today, our understanding of the matter has been broadened so that we include not only - and perhaps not even primarily - economic indicators. But the basic conception of development as a process through which a society moves from a given (underdeveloped) socio-economic condition to another, more desirable (developed) socio-economic condition as a consequence of the provision of education to the appropriate attitudes and skills, technical assistance, and basic infrastructure, remains essentially intact.

The problem begins with the attempt to define the 'developed' socio-economic condition; that is, the state to or toward which development and development assistance seek to advance the relatively underdeveloped. For it is by virtue of certain societies being there already that they are thought to have the knowhow to instruct others. Moreover, implicit in the definition is the key to understanding the nature of underdevelopment.

We begin with a flat assertion. There will never - can never - come a time when every person on Earth will have a command over material resources equal to that of the average American or even West European today.⁴ It should be clear that this does not mean merely that the underdeveloped countries cannot expect to reach per capita GNPs in the \$3,000 - \$5,000 range. It means as well that they cannot possibly seek ultimately to reproduce either the 'socio' or the 'economy' part of socio-economies already in that range.

Owing to this, as well as to the fact that human misery does not seem to have declined much even in underdeveloped countries 'on the move' by the usual criteria, many have argued for a re-definition of the objectives of development. They suggest that rather than pursue a 'Western model', the poor countries should look elsewhere for their definition of what it is to be 'developed'. Most authors, however, have fallen into the trap of seeking a universal 'meaningful' definition of development, and this has resulted in their doing the looking - and the finding - on behalf of the countries they have prejudged as underdeveloped.

Dudley Seers, in his ground-breaking and now famous address to the 1969 SID World Conference,⁵ for example, first argues that neither the experience of the developed countries nor governments of the underdeveloped countries can provide the values which define development meaningfully. He finds that, "Surely the values we need are staring us in the face...if we go back to the question... what are the necessary conditions for a universally acceptable aim, the realization of the potential of human personality?" The implicitly universal answer which Dudley Seers provides is income "Enough to feed a man, and also to cover basic needs of clothing, footwear, and shelter." Furthermore, "Another basic necessity, in

the sense of something without which the personality cannot develop is a job." Moreover, "Equality should also be considered an objective in its own right." And finally "The fulfillment of human potential requires...adequate educational levels, freedom of speech, political liberty, citizenship of a nation that is truly independent, both economically and politically, in the sense that the views of other governments do not largely predetermine his own government's decisions."

While we may wish to grant the universality of the aim of 'fulfillment of human potential', can the interpretation of this aim, and therefore the requirements for it, be other than subject to variation depending on culture? It is indeed puzzling that Dr. Seers first insists that development involves value judgements, then dismisses the values implicit in the development of the West as well as those proclaimed by Third World governments, and lastly asserts on behalf of the underdeveloped peoples what the correct set of values should be, rather than concluding that the matter should be left for them to decide. Before exploring this critical issue, it may be instructive to observe how a representative of a poor country 'looks elsewhere'.

Mahbub ul Haq, of Pakistan, delivered a much-quoted address to the International Development Conference in the spring of 1972.⁶ In it he declared that "to conceive of the objectives of development in terms of Western living standards or to focus on the widening gap between the rich and poor nations is not meaningful at all..." Haq suggests that "the developing countries have no choice but to turn inwards...and to adopt a different style of life more consistent with their own poverty..." Development goals should be "...elimination of malnutrition, disease, illiteracy, squalor, unemployment, and inequality." Underdeveloped countries should not merely be concerned with "how much is produced, but what is produced and how it is distributed." It is clear that "this requires a redefinition of economic and social objectives...of truly staggering proportions."

By who? Why does anyone outside the nation in question have to define social and economic objectives? Why is it that the reformers themselves - both from the rich and from the poor countries - always find that previous definitions of development were lacking, and proceed to offer new definitions that supposedly differ only in magnitude in their applicability among the myriad cultures of the Third World? On the strength of what superior insight can it be claimed that this time development really is being defined correctly? Why do development's most eloquent spokesmen continue to agonize over and probe this issue when their own statements have shown - perhaps without their realizing it - that it is in fact a non-issue for international purposes?

The plain fact is, it is not a definition of development or its objectives per se that is being sought. What is being sought is a workable definition of development in order to salvage from the failures of the past - failures owing largely to then current definitions of development objectives - a continuing justification for development assistance and the presence of the development establishment. Development assistance based on these new definitions is destined only to bring about further disappointment. For the

definitions will be workable only in development assistance terms, conforming to the development assistance establishment's frame of reference, and not reflecting the values and realities traditional and relevant to, and definable only by, the individual societies in question.

Is 'equality' - economic or social - the same for the Indian as for the Swede? Is 'human dignity' the same for the Syrian as for the American? Is 'employment' the same for the Englishman as for the Thai? Yet the givers of development assistance in any form cannot provide it without being in agreement with its intended use. And this means that development objectives and the techniques for achieving them (implicitly, the nature of underdevelopment as well) must conform to a framework of logic deriving from their - the giver countries' - perception of the world and attitude-value systems. They know no other reality.

The question can and has been raised whether those who provide development assistance have succeeded in eliminating unemployment and poverty, in promoting equality and fulfillment of human potential, in controlling what is produced and how it is distributed sufficiently at home to be instructing others in these tasks. But quite apart from that, their accomplishments have been exclusively and inextricably bound up with their history of economic growth. So that, for example, the development establishment⁷ cannot conceive of accomplishing even the most limited development objectives outside a framework of economic expansion.

To cite but one case, most writers on the subject, including the two quoted above, see employment as one of the keys to equality, particularly economic equality, human dignity, and to the elimination of poverty (however that is defined). This means more jobs. Inevitably, then, the underdeveloped country must look to economic growth, particularly industrial growth. Other interpretations of equality, human dignity, even poverty, and certainly other means of achieving them - if necessary under local interpretations - simply do not exist in reality as they perceive it. And while the development establishment is intellectually flexible to a surprising degree, and becoming more so, more jobs still mean an entire complex of priorities, 'human resources', concepts, attitudes, infrastructure, institutions, and so on, modelled on patterns perhaps slightly modified, but essentially originating in the experience of the 'developed' countries.

Thus, even when the givers of development assistance try to turn away from a definition of development in their own image, even when they try to be responsive to more limited, meaningful, and relevant development objectives such as those called for by Seers and Haq, they cannot really succeed. At best, the effect of the redefinition will be to replace a preconceived 'destination' of change with a preconceived 'direction' of change. In the end, the development assistance givers will directly or indirectly promote and impose a concept of 'developed' defined in their own image, after all.

And what is the status of this image? There is serious doubt that the poor countries, given any real choice, are interested in

emulating the rich socio-economies. There is a good deal of agonizing in the governments of many over the conflict between what they have been given to understand as necessary progress, and the maintenance of traditional life and values. More significantly, a great debate now rages within the industrialized countries concerning whether they are really 'developed' in any but a narrowly and culturally defined economic sense, if that. Their basic value systems, even the striving for improved technology and greater economic efficiency, are now being questioned. Many in the advanced countries have begun to turn to more 'primitive' societies for guidance to improve the quality of life, and even for superior types of 'technology'. The debate will not be joined here. Suffice it to say that the fact that so much uncertainty prevails even at home must disqualify any overall definitions of 'developed', 'development', or 'underdevelopment' based on the experience of the so-called developed countries.

It cannot be denied that there is human misery in the world, and it would be inhuman not to attempt to eradicate it. But a clear distinction must be made between assistance to alleviate human misery and assistance to bring about social change. Social change may come about, may be necessary, and may be sought, but in any case it must be viewed by the outside world only as change, with neutral value, not as 'development' or 'progress', which are synonymous with 'improvement'. If problems of human misery, as any society views it in its own terms, can be alleviated without significantly altering the pattern of life, there remains no basis for labelling that society 'underdeveloped' even if it produces but \$20 per person per year in its commercial economy.

What is the nature of underdevelopment? There really is no such thing, except as a society by truly looking inwards, may wish to define it for itself. There is human misery, and assistance should be given to alleviate it. 'Development assistance' which acts on any other aspect of the fabric of a society, whether requested or not, is not development assistance at all, but interference in the social evolution and historical self-determination of others.

The Nature of Constructive Relationships

The condition which justifies a form of official assistance by those capable of providing it is that in which large numbers of people are chronically plagued with malnutrition and poor health, to the point where pondering development objectives in any other sense is to them an irrelevant exercise.⁸

We are not speaking of poverty, inequality, unemployment, human dignity, and other culturally defined terms. These may be interpreted as appropriate by any society (as may the means for dealing with them), and may figure in a program of self-development (which may or may not include economic expansion) it may wish to undertake. If so, it must be left to design and undertake this program in its own way, and within the limitations of its own resources. In its worst form, 'development assistance' not only instructs nations in 'overcoming' these problems, thereby tampering with their creative social processes, but promotes solutions beyond the capacities of their own resources, thereby ensuring an erosion of their sovereignty.

The role of international assistance, then, must be exclusively to enable a society to determine its own course and with its own means, by helping it to free itself of the ravages of human physical misery of the most basic kind. The present development assistance establishment, owing to its institutional nature, absence of interest and experience in dealing with such a limited role, and lack of appropriate professional skills, is totally incapable of taking on the job. We therefore propose the following measures:

- (1) the total dismantling of the present development assistance structure, and the termination of all related programs;
- (2) the establishment of official assistance programs comprised exclusively of guided grants earmarked for coordinated health and birth-control systems;
- (3) the promotion of constructive international relationships, based on equality and mutual respect.

It is fully appreciated that having gone this far, development assistance may, in net, be responsible for creating more misery than it has eliminated. And it has become so intertwined with the economies of so many countries that to pack up suddenly and leave would create nothing less than a calamity for millions of people, and probably result in the downfall of not a few governments.⁹ For these reasons the withdrawal and dismantling must be accomplished carefully, perhaps over a period of several years. But it is a necessary first step.

For we have seen that development assistance as it is practiced today could, for the most part, be more correctly labelled 'foreign social change assistance'. And there simply is no justification for governments or international bodies to be in the foreign social change assistance business. After all, there are many businesses in which governments do not engage, even if requested. But once it is generally accepted that governments do not provide foreign social change assistance, it is unlikely that others will request it. Governments are not, for example, in the foreign architectural improvement business; and the governments of poor countries do not, as a rule, ask the governments of rich ones for assistance in improving the general physical and functional qualities of their structures.

The dismantling must be total. All bilateral and multilateral programs related to 'development' must be phased out. All official undertakings based upon a developed-underdeveloped, advanced-traditional, or any other implicitly superior-inferior relationship must be brought to a close. The current concept and practice of development assistance must be written off as perhaps a well-intentioned error born of post-war confidence and exuberance. There must arise a general recognition of the fact that no society, no 'foreign expert', no multinational organization can provide the guidance for achieving a society that is in any general sense superior to or 'more developed' than any that already exists.

The objective of guided grants earmarked for coordinated health and birth-control systems is to enable the requesting recipient society to develop a healthy population of a size supportable by its resources within the context of its chosen way of life. It is realized that this task is more complex than might at first appear.

Nevertheless, over a period of time, through a combination of training programs and installation of appropriate facilities, it should be possible to make considerable headway on this score without becoming involved in other matters to a significant degree. Immediately, many development assistance resources presently earmarked for 'foreign social change assistance' projects can be redirected to this activity.

Donors must fashion the precise form and phasing of the health and birth-control assistance in collaboration with recipients. But they cannot permit themselves to stray into other areas of change or to provide piecemeal programs. The potential recipient that rejects the objectives of this kind of assistance thereby implicitly declares its priorities and values to be inconsistent with the aid that is available; and that is its sovereign right. For the donors, it is only through coordinated health and birth-control programs that they can be reasonably certain of not bringing about more misery by dooming a larger population to an inadequate resource base. It is only through assistance of this kind, if necessary, that societies can achieve a healthy population in balance with its natural environment, the necessary ingredient for true self-determination.

Development assistance is a rather recent phenomenon. But nations have been learning from each other throughout recorded history. For the most part, and with the exception of cases of military conquest, societies have influenced each other through trade and other forms of personal contact. Over time, some have had major influences on others. Architectural styles, systems of government technology, crops, even culinary arts have been exchanged. Introduced through personal contact, however, they usually passed through an extended filtering process before being generally accepted. In the course of this filtering process either the society gradually adjusted to the new idea or the new idea itself underwent modification to meet the requirements of the society. And of course, many new ideas introduced this way never won acceptance. In any case, as a result of the filtering process, serious disruption generally was prevented.

Times have changed, and rapid communications are nearly universal. Still, there is a vast difference between the introduction of new ideas in the course of normal relations between equal societies, and the virtual imposition overnight of entire complexes of institutions, technologies, attitudes - indeed, ways of life - that result from the operations of the development assistance establishment as it is known today. Accordingly, the disruption has been staggering, and one is hard put to justify the high price that has been paid by those affected.

The specter of representatives of the governments of a rich and a poor country collaborating to alter the social fabric of the latter is shocking indeed. Yet it is a quite regular occurrence, despite the fact that it represents a level of interference in the culture and traditions of the poor nation that would never be tolerated in the rich. It is made possible by the fact that both governments feel that the rich country can provide something that the poor country needs. They are convinced of this, despite the lack of substantial evidence, because the members of both governments have, effectively, been to the same school.¹⁰ They do not

come together as equals, but as developed and underdeveloped. The basis for a truly constructive relationship is missing.

We propose a return to constructive international relationships, based on inequality, self-respect, and mutual respect, regardless of relative per capita GNPs or differences in cultures and values. This means that ideas are exchanged as people and goods flow back and forth among nations. George Axinn has proposed a system of 'iterative reciprocity', which "suggests continuous growth and benefit to each participant,"¹¹ a concept that may be relevant in this context. Individuals may still be called on to contribute their skills to the solution of specific problems in countries lacking those skills, but they must not go as experts in development, as representatives of any government, or as part of any official development assistance program (with the exception, of course, of the health and birth-control programs mentioned). If this new posture can be assumed; if the rich countries can shake off the conviction that they have the gospel and the compulsion to spread it; if the Third World societies can see themselves for what they are - burdened with some urgent human problems to be solved, but not 'underdeveloped', or worse yet 'developing'; perhaps truly constructive relationships can be established that will contribute to the development of both the rich and the poor, each in accordance with the priorities of their own unique social systems.

Footnotes

1. Indeed, it is widely agreed that these societies will have to undergo traumatic alterations before the end of the century merely to survive. This, on grounds of resource depletion and environmental contamination alone.
2. We wish to stress at the outset of our argument that our remarks are addressed to an audience assumed to be sincerely interested in what it understands as the development of underdeveloped countries - and anxious to take steps to promote it without regard to the effect on the power or economic bases of the developed countries. Any other assumption would make this essay and all others like it superfluous exercises in a vacuum of unreality. This they may be, but discussion of the matter will be left for other forums.
3. George H. Axinn, "Linkage versus Intervention - An Alternative Strategy for International Assistance in Rural Development" (paper presented to the Annual Meeting of the Rural Sociological Society, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, August, 1972), p. 2.
4. The literature supporting this is now significant, and growing rapidly. The reader who seriously questions this assertion should begin with Donella H. Meadows et al., The Limits to Growth (New York: Universe Books, 1972). Lugo and Van Raay (eds), Man and Environment (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, forthcoming 1974) will contain some instructive insights as well.
5. The quotations in this paragraph are all from Dudley Seers, "The Meaning of Development", paper given at the 11th World Conference of the Society for International Development", New Delhi, 1969, under the original title "Challenges to Development Theories and Strategies". Reprinted by the Agricultural Development Council, Inc., New York, 1970.
6. The quotations in this paragraph are all from the excerpt of the address which appeared in the May, 1972 Newsletter of the Society for International Development (p. 4). The precise citation given there was: Mahbub ul Haq, Senior Advisor, Economic Department, World Bank, in an address (expressing his own personal views) to the International Development Conference, Washington, D.C., April 20, 1972. For purposes of clarity, the order of the quotations has been changed, but their intent is presented intact.
7. Despite the fact that the 'development establishment' is international, its members - whether development assistance scholars, givers, or receivers - are schooled in the ways of the industrial countries to the point where it makes little difference what their actual cultural origins are insofar as their basic 'mental set' with regard to development is concerned.
8. A clear distinction must be made between assistance to overcome the condition described, and disaster relief. The latter is temporary emergency aid, and is beyond the framework of a discussion on development assistance.
9. This alone provides an excellent measure of the failure of this kind of assistance.

10. There exists another possibility, of course. Namely, that the members of the government of the poor country are motivated by personal interests. But to consider this in the present context would take the discussion further afield than is desirable.

11. George Axinn, "Linkage versus Intervention", p. 16.