

# A confront between Modernisation and Postmodernism: an analysis of the Millennium Villages Project

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## Abstract

The Millennium Villages Project (MVP) was elaborated in order to help African poorest regions to reach the Millennium Development Goals through investments in health, education, agricultural productivity and infrastructure. MVP received positive critiques – regarding to local infrastructural progress –, but also negative ones – related to its lack of sustainability and bad impacts in villagers lives. Depending on the perspective used to examine reality one can come to a certain conclusion, so the present paper aims to analyze MVP through different Development theories: Modernisation and Postmodernism. Through Modernisation it can be implied that MVP is a real wish of the Western countries to incentive development and provide aid through their know-how; on the other hand, Postmodernism would consider MVP a trial to spread the Western values that does not represent the real needs of the locals. Both theories present strong and weak points and the idea will be discussed deeper during the research.

**Keywords:** Millennium Village Project; Modernisation; Postmodernism.

## Um confronto entre a modernização e o posmodernismo: uma análise do Projeto Aldeias do Milênio

### Resumo

O Projeto Aldeias do Milênio (MVP) elaborou-se para ajudar às regiões mais pobres de África a atingir os Objetivos de Desenvolvimento do Milênio mediante investimentos em saúde, educação, produtividade agrícola e infra-estrutura. O MVP recebeu críticas positivas – com respeito ao progresso da infra-estrutura local-, mas também negativas – relacionadas com sua falta de sustentabilidade e seus maus impactos em a vida dos aldeanos. Dependendo da perspectiva utilizada para examinar a realidade pode ser

chegado a uma verdadeira conclusão, pelo que o presente trabalho pretende analisar o PVM através de diferentes teorias de desenvolvimento: Modernização e Postmodernismo. Através da modernização pode ser implicado que o MVP é um desejo real dos países ocidentais de incentivar o desenvolvimento e proporcionar ajuda através de seus conhecimentos técnicos; por outro lado, o postmodernismo consideraria ao MVP como um ensaio para difundir os valores ocidentais que não representam as necessidades reais dos carvões. Ambas teorias apresentam pontos fortes e débis e a ideia se discutirá mais a fundo durante a investigação.

**Palavras-chave:** Modernização; Postmodernismo; Projeto Aldeia do Milênio.

## Un enfrentamiento entre la modernización y el posmodernismo: un análisis del Proyecto Aldeas del Milenio

### Resumen

El Millennium Villages Project (MVP) se elaboró para ayudar a las regiones más pobres de África a alcanzar los Objetivos de Desarrollo del Milenio mediante inversiones en salud, educación, productividad agrícola e infraestructura. El MVP recibió críticas positivas – con respecto al progreso de la infraestructura local-, pero también negativas – relacionadas con su falta de sostenibilidad y sus impactos negativos en la vida de los aldeanos. Dependiendo de la perspectiva utilizada para examinar la realidad se puede llegar a una cierta conclusión, por lo que el presente trabajo pretende analizar el MVP a través de diferentes teorías de desarrollo: Modernización y Postmodernismo. A través de la modernización se puede entender que el MVP es un deseo real de los países occidentales de incentivar el desarrollo y proporcionar ayuda a través de sus conocimientos técnicos; por otro lado, el postmodernismo consideraría al MVP como un ensayo para difundir los valores occidentales que no representan las necesidades reales de los locales. Ambas teorías presentan puntos fuertes y débiles y la idea se discutirá más a fondo durante la investigación.

**Palabras clave:** Millennium Village Project; Modernización; Postmodernismo.

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### 1 Introduction

The fight against inequality and poverty is a challenge to society. At the present time over 1 billion people suffer from extreme poverty that includes malnutrition, poor health care and education, and also no access to safe water (THIRLWALL, 2002). This scenario requires changes, but conducting development demands conjunct efforts from international institutions, local governments and local people; and in the majority of occa-

sions there are conflicting interests between these agents, such as political or economic. In the trial to overcome these particular conflicting interests, a global plan to fight poverty, known as Millennium Development Goals (MDG), was draw during the United Nations General Assembly in 2000 to guide the internal development of countries, with the aim to improve people's life quality until 2015.

Due to the historical, economic, political and structural differences between countries it was assumed that not all of them could reach by themselves the goals established in the MDG. Continents as Africa suffers from several deprivations and from poor governance, so the chances are few that this region could manage the tasks alone. Taking this factors into consideration an International Integrated Development Aid Project called The Millennium Villages Project (MVP) was designed by the economist Jeffrey Sachs, with United Nations (UN) support, to help African poorest regions to reach MDG through investments in health, education, agricultural productivity and infrastructure (SANCHEZ, *et al.*, 2007).

The main point is to show how MVP can be seen through theoretical perspectives – that have been formulated to offer answers of how one can understand and explain reality (JÖNSSON, *et al.* 2012). The Modernisation and Postmodernism theories will be used in order to show how reality can be different depending on the theory used to analyze it. It is important to have this kind of investigation, since projects that are criticized and seen through different angles can be reproduced in similar initiatives and the tendency is that it gets improved each time more.

## 2 Theories of development: modernisation and postmodernism

Theories are statements that aim to explain how the world is organized, they are important because they allow events to be examined more impartially, since they assume a distance from reality to explicate and to understand occurrences. It is assumed that each theory strengths some factors and disregards others less relevant in their conception and that is why certain theories sometimes diverge and confront to each other (JÖNSSON, *et al.* 2012).

In the field of Development there is a variety of theories focusing specially in the task to understand to promote social change, and they can be defined as “a junction between ideology, politics and explanation, where we reflect critically and systematically about development” (PIETERSE 2010:1-2, apud JÖNSSON, *et al.* 2012:39). In this field there are also confronts among theories. Some of them have focus on economic aspects and analyze the world according to what it is, such as Modernisation, Structuralism and Dependency theories. Others are more critical and take into account cultural, political and social perspectives, such as Postcolonialism and Postmodernism theories (JÖNSSON, *et al.* 2012). For a matter of analyses, in this present work, only the Modernisation and Postmodernism theories will be discussed.

### 2.1 Modernisation

Modernisation found a fertile arena to be introduced as a Development Theory after the Second World War (1939-1945) for different reasons. The implementation of the

Marshall Plan as a United States trial to rebuild the war-affected countries, the spread of a communist movement and the emergence of new nations-states – seeking for a model of development – after the disintegration of Europe colonies in Asia, Latin America and Africa; all these factor contributed to the spread of Modernisation Theory, since the United States started to represent the ideal world – democratic and capitalist – as a role model to be followed by the others, both to create internal development and to stop the communist march (REYES, 2001).

According to Rostow, a proponent of Modernisation theory, economic development is possible through five-evolutionary-steps such as the existence of a traditional society, pre-take off conditions, take-off, the drive to maturity, and the age of high mass consumption. According to him the traditional society is that one that has no investments in industry that is based on an agrarian subsistence economy – that is the first step where some Less Developed Countries are located; the second consists in specialization, the third in industrialization, the fourth in diversification and the fifth in consumer oriented market – the case of Western countries (ROSTOW, 1960). Some general statements of the Modernisation theory are that Western countries are important in the effort to help poor countries to “catch up”, that market and entrepreneurs are essential in the modernisation process and that poverty is a result of internal social relations (JÖNSSON, *et al.* 2012).

## 2.2 Postmodernism

Postmodernism became stronger in the field of Development in the 1990s by its criticism to the other development theories for generalizing countries realities as they were homogeneous, disregarding ethnic and cultural aspects of their analyze (JÖNSSON, *et al.* 2012). According to Postmodernism, in general, these criticized theories spread the idea that West is the ideal world by creating vocabularies that compares regions, such as “developed and underdeveloped countries” and they end up generating a feeling of inferiority in other states (SUMNER; TRIBE, 2008). This present theory defends the idea that all these comparisons are created by powerful actors that imposes their way of thinking to the less favorable societies. Through this view the idea of underdevelopment is just a product of western creation for domination (SUMNER; TRIBE, 2008).

The Postmodern Theory does not believe in development projects and planned interventions, conducted by external and internal actors, focused on economic aspects to reach welfare (JÖNSSON, *et al.* 2012). Instead, it says that having a focus on cultural factors can help to reach development through giving local communities voice to their own perceptions (SIMON, 2002). For this approach it is important to deconstruct social discourses, to take into account the conflict existence in power relations and the different needs of subordinated groups, so a new way to represent reality can be created (SIMON, 2002).

## 2.3 Basic Criticism to Modernisation and Postmodernism Theories

What can be implied so far is that both theories have its limitations. Modernism is criticized for being mono-causal, since it attributes underdevelopment only to internal

factors, and also for having an ethnocentric focus on western civilizations, disregarding the value of other cultures. In the other hand the main critic to Postmodernism is that it does not present concrete statements to fight poverty and neither clear explanations of how the “dominant discourse” could be deconstructed (JÖNSSON, *et. al*, 2012).

In the next session a background of the Millennium Villages Project (MVP) will be given and subsequently it will be analyzed through the above theories.

### 3 Millennium villages project

The need to fight inequality and poverty became global and clearer after the establishment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), since there was an agreement between nations to define specific objectives and goals that poor countries must pursue in order to reach development (FUKUDA-PARR; HULME, 2011). MDG were defined in 2000 during the General Assembly of the United Nations and aims to improve the life of world's poor through specific goals such as eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, provide universal primary education, reach gender equality, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, combat HIV, malaria and other diseases, ensure environmental sustainability and create a global cooperation for development (RIGG, 2002).

The internal background of some continents and regions make MDG a challenging task to be fulfilled without external help, which is the case of Africa continent that struggles with local factors. In Africa almost 70% of the population lives in rural areas with a low productive capital, and a below subsistence living standard that prevents them to save money or to buy improved inputs to fertilize the soil. So they do not have financial saving, proper soil to cultivate, and neither nourished food to eat. This food problem together with the economic and environmental ones leads to a several health problems. The result is a poverty trap that is reinforced by a poor governance (SANCHEZ, 2007). Taking this scenario into consideration Jeffrey Sachs, with the United Nations support, draw the Millennium Villages Project (MVP) to help the poorest African regions to reach the MDG.

The villages started to being established in 2004, the first one was in Kenya and then the initiative was spread to other countries, such as Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, Mali, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania, and Uganda (SANCHEZ, 2007). The villages chosen are located in agro ecological zones that together correspond to a farming system used by 90% of the rural population (SANCHEZ, 2007). The basic principles of MVP are:

Science- and evidence-based, implementing technologies and practices that have already been proven; Community-based, with a participatory approach to planning, implementation, and monitoring that contextualizes the specific set of interventions for each village; Enhanced by local capacity development in technical, managerial, and participatory skills; Based on multisectoral and integrated interventions; Geared toward gender equality and environmental sustainability; Linked to district, national, and global strategies; Supported by partnerships with other development groups: Cost-shared by the community, government, and donors: Supported by increased national-scale financing of public goods in line with increased official development assistance (ODA) made available to African governments (SANCHEZ, 2007).

Through a conjunct investment of donors, local villagers and government the Project predicts an amount of U\$ 110 per capita, per year, during a period of 5 to 10 years. The Project intends to promote implementations taking into account local priorities; these interventions are divided in phases. In the first set of interventions some of the priorities are increase food production, control malaria through distribution of bednets, build health clinics, provide drinking water and enhance community capacity building (SANCHEZ, 2007). The following sets are created according to the results reached by the first one.

Besides the investments previous cited, MVP aims to reach development by elevating rural productivity that for its time would lead to more private sectors investments and reserves. In this manner, capital stock would be increased and the villages could start to overcome poverty. One of the intentions of Millennium Villages Project is also enhance local people's capabilities that mean to provide locals with decision power, to involve them in the implementation of the Project, so they can act in favor of their own needs, empowered with freedom to choose and to act by themselves (SEN, 2001).

### 3.1 Criticism to Millennium Villages Project

The initial results of the Project divide opinions, since some statistics show positive effects in local communities and other ones criticize its efficacy.

According to evaluation reports of the first Millennium Village established in 2004, called Sauri – localized in Kenya – good impacts were observed in the areas of health and agriculture. Before the Project begins the closest health care center was localized 5 kilometers from the Sauri village, after the construction of a Community Dispensary in the village more than 35476 people were treated there, 72% Sauri inhabitants. Due to the availability of inputs, farmers could increase the planted area and also diversify the crops, this change increased in one year the maize yields in 2.6-fold (SANCHEZ, 2007).

Negative aspects were discussed by the World Bank, that questions the reliability of the Project results, since that there are not “control villages” that can be compared with the performance of the other ones (THE ECONOMIST, 2012). Another discussed point is that the Project is not self-sustainable in long term, since localities would not be able to continue the investments done during the Project when the aid is finish. There are also critics related to the real involvement of local people in process, since their mentality sometimes is not the same as donors, so there are cases of communities not adopting the actions established in the Project in their daily life, one example is that distributed bednets were using as scarfs in many villages.

## 4 Millennium villages project seen through the modernisation and postmodernist theories

The use of Modernisation and Postmodernism theories to analyze Millennium Villages Project can enable readers to see the Project itself through distinct outlooks. These theories were chosen mainly because of their views related to development projects. While Modernisation consider of vital importance international development pro-

jects to help Less Developed Countries to catch up with the developed ones, Postmodernism sees it suspiciously, since they are skeptical to planned interventions (JÖNSSON, et. al, 2012). As one opposes itself to the other, the analysis could be richer contrasting this two different perspectives. The result of this confront can be seen in this following section: as it will be seen, Modernisation treats MVP with focus in its benefits and in the goodwill of the initiative and Postmodernism faces the Project with focus in its damages to community and in the hegemonic discourse aiders.

#### 4.1 Modernisation Theory Perspective

Through the view of Modernisation Theory it can be implied that Millennium Villages Project (MVP) is an aid plan designed by a Western initiative in the trial to develop local African Villages. Western International Aid is important because it permits the localities to modernize, and make adjustments in the national sphere, as Africa is underdeveloped due to internal factors, not external ones. Besides the Aid, since West is developed and industrialized, local African Villages need to reproduce and assimilate the successful formula of capitalism and democracy to reach economic and social improvements. Taking this idea into account, the chosen villages to host the Project would be are a role model to spread the idea of progress to other regions.

According to this perspective MVP can be seen not as a self-interested initiative but as a real wish of the western countries to provide villagers basic needs and goods such as services, agricultural inputs to elevate productivity, simple health services, schools, potable water, sanitation, and basic infrastructure (MILLENNIUM VILLAGES, 2013). The provision of these goodies is important to take the regions out of the Poverty Trap and is the first step of the evolutionary modernisation process defended by Rostow. As Western countries had reached the last step in this evolutionary process they have goodwill to help other nations to do the same.

Modernisation theory takes into account the importance of the state and of a good administration in conducting the development process, through a democratic behavior. For the Millennium Villages Project national governments participation is also significant, that is why villages are established only in those countries that have leaders who support the programs and are willing to help the Project. In the local level MVP not only promotes democracy by giving the locals an active participation in implementing and maintaining the project, but also provides gender equality by empowering women and integrating them in the decisions process (MILLENNIUM VILLAGES, 2013). This local empowerment is important for international aid programs being well succeed, since to draw positive plans there is the need to have a positive interaction between donors and locals actors: understanding the local reality through villagers and engaging with them is being "political smart" (THOMAS; DIANE, 2013).

Millennium Villages Project, according to Modernisation, has a market-based and a mixed-economy strategy to promote economic development that can help villages in the process of liberalization and free-trade system, essential to modern societies. Since the Project propitiate the locals the possibility to save money by raising the stock capital, they will be able to do investments in commercial farm and also diversify the crops. Besides, the investments in infrastructures and roads upgrading can facilitate the transportation to markets (SANCHEZ, 2007). In this manner it can be said that MVP is

propitiating real progress to these societies, since for modernisation the lack of capital is one of the main reasons for underdevelopment.

As it can be seen, through the view of this theory, external aid can really help poor countries, or “traditional” ones according to Rostow, to develop; all investments in infrastructure, in basic goodies and in agriculture enable villages to walk in the direction of modernisation, by propitiating them a possibility to start being more self-sufficient internally and enabling them to have a free-market ideology through surplus of agriculture.

## 4.2 Postmodernist Theory Perspective

Postmodernist theory has a distinct approach to see Millennium Villages Project. Through its view, MVP is a trial to Western Countries to disseminate their principles of democracy and capitalism by creating the idea that African villages are underdeveloped. The word “creating” was used because, according to this theory, reality is something that can vary from perspective to perspective, so there is not an universal truth (SUMNER; TRIBE, 2008). By using a dominant discourse villagers are led to a position of inferiority and their values are disregarded through the spread of a west culture.

For Postmodernism, as MVP was designed by external actors it does not represent properly the will of locals. Opposing this idea, Modernisation theory would argue that one of the project basis is the empowerment of locals, however even empowerment could be dangerous. The so called will to improve – the intent to develop the capacity of others – can cause some problems, since when participatory approaches are done with less responsive development agencies it can lead to tyranny (LI, 2007). Donors do not take the proper consideration the form of government present in the local community, and they expect them to act as representative of the public interest, which sometimes do not occur – as Africa has problems with governance it could be expected that local governments just focus on their own interests, even when they compromise to engage with the Project (LI, 2007). Donors do not pay attention also in the power relations in their own self positioning – so by doing empowerment they assume that they are superior or experts that detain all the techniques and the locals are treated as inferiors by not having power or knowledge enough. Besides, by ignoring the structural sources of inequality donors expect that villagers properly start to do their own efforts to improve their own conditions, which sometimes do not occur, mainly because the local hidden agenda is ignored (LI, 2007).

MVP intents to improve can lead to bigger problems in the local community, such tensions and acculturation. MVP local people need to decide themselves how they want to live according to their own wishes and how they want to draw a plan of conduct. In general successful projects are those ones beginning with the wish of locals, because in certain occasions villagers do not will to have structural changes in their communities, but only improve their life conditions (LI, 2007). This internal dissatisfaction in the course of the Project implementation can lead to generalized internal conflicts between villagers in favor and the ones against the measures established by donors. Another point is that MVP is held only in pre-selected regions, so tensions among different villages can happen, since the ones that were not chose to receive the “improvements” can feel excluded.



Millennium Villages Project, according to this theory, generalize African villages problems, since it assumes that the same developing plan can be implemented in all villages, localized in different regions, with their own peculiarities. It is implied also that all the localities will need the same amount of money (US\$ 110 per capita, per year) to develop, so the heterogeneity is not taken into account. So there is the need to deconstruct this social discourse, taking into consideration the hidden agendas of these villages and their internal conflicts (SIMON, 2008), otherwise the Project cannot be sustainable through the years.

As stated above, Postmodernist Theory does not see development projects as solutions for underdevelopment, but as Western instruments of hegemony, used to spread their values and culture. In this manner, Millennium Villages Project is not a promising idea, actually it is harmful to locals, since it is only a discourse of dominant countries and do not correspond in fact to the reality of villagers.

## 5 Conclusion

The present work had as purpose show how Millennium Villages Project (MVP) could be seen through the view Modernisation and Postmodernism, different theoretical perspectives. Firstly this paper described these theories and its perspectives, then a background of MVP was shown and finally an analysis of the Project through the theories was made.

It was clear that Millennium Villages Project (MVP) was formulated to create practical ways for the poorest African villages to reach the Millennium Development Goals. In its efforts the Project seems to be successful; at first glance it can be said that investments in basic goods and improving agricultural activities are the first steps to overcome poverty trap. However, the Project has been criticized for being just a palliative method, since after the aid period the villagers will not be able to continue the efforts by their owns. The fact that villagers are not completely involved in the Project for cultural matters or personal choices is also taken into account when talking about the efficacy of the Project.

Analyzed through the view of theories, Millennium Villages Project can assume different shapes. Modernisation theory points the Project as a trial of developed countries to improve villagers life quality and development through conducting them to adopt the western modernization formula, which comprises capitalism and democracy. Through this point of view the aiders effort is not guided by a self-interest approach, but they do that because they are aware of the importance to help other regions to be modernized. On the other hand, Postmodernism assumes that MVP is just an instrument of ethnocentric western countries to dominate and to impose their culture and values for the African regions. It affirms also that by assuming that villages are underdeveloped, west is creating a feeling of inferiority in the assisted society, disregarding their own culture and principles. According them the development is possible through giving attention to cultural aspects, not economic or social ones.

As it can be seen none of the theories explain deeply the causes of underdevelopment nor offer concrete and efficient ways to overcome poverty. Modernisation attributes to internal factors the main cause of underdevelopment and disregard other aspects and Postmodernism is an epistemological concept that do not bring concrete

causes to explain it. To understand the reasons of underdevelopment one cannot adopt a mono causality approach, there are a lot of causes that must be taken into account when explaining why a nation could not catch up with the others, such as historical factors, economic reasons and external and internal dynamics. In the same way there are a lot of efforts to be done to fight poverty, such as investments not only in basic goods but also in social programs, changes in internal structures, especially in industry, policy changes and also governance improvement.

Theories try to explain reality, but excluding some factors and taking just a few into account make them monocausal. Reality is consisted of many aspects and to explain it a systematic approach need to be done to deeply understand causes. To properly analyze Millennium Villages Project it is not possible just to be restricted in one perspective, that is why the idea to confront two theories. However, as it was said it is important to take several factors into account before come into a conclusion whether MVP is efficient or not, such as the real intentions of donators, the will of villagers to be involved, the engagement of local governments, the long term possibility of sustainability and the real current results.

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