



Plenary Session

Redefining development goals: Science, Technology and Innovation, sustainable growth, improvement of income distribution and social welfare

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Issues for the debate

The generalized improvement of human well being is supposed to be the ultimate goal of development. The right of every human being to “not to be less or live less”, as Amartya Sen states the essence of development as freedom, is perhaps the most eloquent way of describing it. But this goal is usually perceived as rather utopian or idyllic; its fulfillment is then relegated to such a far away future that it is easy to forget the link between what we do today and the fruit we want to harvest tomorrow. It is our aim in the collective discussion at the opening of this Globelics Mexico conference to try not to forget such link.

The redefinition of development goals is a process revamped with each developmental failure and with some developmental successes. More precisely, failures and successes revamp the redefinition of developmental strategies and development instruments. After the failure of the Washington Consensus, the statement that “market friendliness and economic growth is not enough” became common sense, and the discussion around what else is needed for development gained again momentum. The impressive developmental successes of some East Asian countries or that of small nations like Ireland, Finland, Iceland or New Zealand, led to diverse recommendations following different appreciations of what was the key to their success.

Science, technology and innovation or, more precisely, endogenous capability building underlying the importance of research and higher education are key dimensions for development; it can be observed that in development failures such dimensions have been rather neglected while in development successes they have been truly prioritized. But once this stated, how to make science, technology and innovation play for development continues to be far from clear; moreover, we can be sure that “one size fits all” type of recommendations are doomed to failure. One point deserves special attention: as Everett Rogers made plainly clear, innovation can foster inequality there where high inequality already exists. All the above-mentioned successes have two traits in common: innovation played there a big role, and at the beginning of the process a fairly equalitarian situation was already achieved. A key question for redefining development goals, strategies and instruments is then the following: what kind of science, technology and innovation policies are needed to foster development in nations characterized by high levels of inequality? The question deserves to be asked given that the vast majority of developing countries today are highly unequal.

- Is it possible for innovation policies to get involved directly with the fight against inequality? If not, why? If yes, how?
- How to combine different types of innovation strategies and instruments aiming to achieve at the same time different developmental goals, like sustainable economic growth and social welfare?
- Which other public policies should redefine their goals to allow “developmental innovation policies” to be put in place? What would such redirections imply?
- Is it reasonable to talk about “developmental innovation systems” as species of the Innovation System’s family? If yes, which would be their specific traits?