

## **Developmentalism**

### **I.**

In many ways developmentalism is a critical concept *après la lettre* or, to put it differently, it is an exercise in 'post-diction'. In other words, in its heyday development did not think itself as an "ism", but rested firmly on the belief in development. In German one spoke quite confidently of "nachholende Entwicklung" (development as catching up) and in the early years this was without any critical or sceptical afterthought. Development rested on the assumption of the universality of linear forms of social progress. It was part of a concept of modernity with development as a normative process of becoming. That is, the certainty that progress is the normal, long term direction of all social change, whereby the fruits of well-being would eventually be shared and enjoyed by all and on a world-wide scale. Within that concept the chief driving force is economic development whereby a country increases the per capita gross domestic product and secures steady economic growth, structural transformation of the society and economic welfare. This would trickle down with a minimum of equity to distant regions as well as to the poorer strata of the society. The adoption and application of industrial technologies figured prominently in the concept as did the perspective of mass consumption of industrially produced goods.

The political origins of this vision of the world within which the developed part of the world portrays the potential image of the globe usually is traced back to the inaugural address of President Truman in January 1949, when he referred to the former colonies as "underdeveloped areas" whose "economic life is primitive and stagnant" and whose poverty constitutes a threat to themselves and to the developed world. With "capital investment in areas needing development" Truman thought to kick off a process that would eventually allow for these poor areas to catch up with the already more fortunate ones. A model of universal validity was established, that of the industrialized world – the industrialized 'free' world, that is, for we are in the bloom of the Cold War.

Development or 'nachholende Entwicklung' is closely connected to the project of modernization which in turn was fuelled by powerful schools of thought in post-war mainstream economics and social sciences. The underlying economic reasoning is best described by the title of W.W. Rostow's seminal publication "The stages of economic growth. A non-communist manifesto". The societal prerequisites of such development were theorized by influential sociologists of the day, most notably Talcott Parsons in his reading of Max Weber, and were exactly those analysed as having brought forth modern European society: Secularization, rationalization, scientific thinking, social differentiation and a competitive sense of individual achievement, within the political form of a

nation state with some kind of democratic institutions. Development was seen as identical with increase of productivity and economic growth with industrialization, urbanization, alphabetisation, social mobility and in the end a fully developed democratic system. *En attendant*, as I heard it so elegantly expressed in francophone Africa, *en attendant*, what is required might be, if not all-out dictatorship, but some other kind of authoritarian repressive regime.

Where most of these features and factors deemed necessary were missing, it was the job of development policies to strengthen the social forces most open to modernity within backward societies. Financial and technical assistance would trigger off growth dynamics the benefits of which would eventually trickle down. The trickle down process was actually conceptualised as a dual one: within the larger society it would flow or rather trickle from the affluent to the poor, within households from the male head of household to the rest of the family.

For several decades the modernist paradigm has dominated the international aid apparatus. Simultaneously, however, this apparatus has been powerless and uncomprehending in the face of growing systemic crisis and political fragmentation. Complex problems encountered within and between countries were diagnosed by what a society, a country, a region is not and reduced to discrete technical issues – rather than issues of power and inequality – to be managed and solved through ‘rational’ development project and programme interventions. Correspondingly, developing countries cast themselves as being on the way to industrialization and economic growth more often than not through rather heavy-handed state control and the construction of an elaborate structure of bureaucracy.

The certainty of progress was guided by an implicit belief in some sort of rationality acting itself out in history. Feminist and post-colonial critique revealed the extent to which this concept of rationality is impregnated by the specificities of European history and deeply tied with the interests and perceptions of the bearers of power, - men, that is.

## **II.**

Long before in the early nineties post-developmentalism framed its critique in post-structuralist und post-colonial concepts inspired by Derrida, Lyotard and Foucault, the development community itself pronounced itself in deep crisis. Development theory saw itself at an ‘impasse’ (Booth 1985, Schuurman 1993). Basic concepts and models underlying the notion of development were said to be in need of revision (Menzel 1992, Nuscheler 1993). Basically, three reasons were given for the demise of the old modernization model.

- ecological reasons: often presented in the metaphor of two additional globes required to meet the resource and the waste needs of the dominant production and consumption model
- economic reasons: the capitalist mode of production is incapable of marrying profitability with work and well-being for all of humankind

- Sociological reasons: in many, if not most societies the societal and institutional prerequisites for economic and political development simply do not exist.

### III.

The nineties saw a strange bifurcation. On the one hand, classical development and modernization theory resurfaced in the aftermath of the implosion of the alleged socialist alternative. The “back to modernization” move inevitably entailed a return to Eurocentrism, with the European or Western model providing the benchmark for all other types or modes of development. (Hettne 1995, Zapf 1997) On the other hand, *nachholende Entwicklung* is professed to be out, sustainable development is hailed in.

Sustainable development claims to accommodate the realization that the old idea of development is altogether unfeasible, apart from being undesirable on various grounds. The concept sees itself as applying equally to all countries and regions and to be inherently reflexive, i.e. it implies the scrupulous revision of past strategic pitfalls and the collective search for a new model of development that promises to be wholesome for all of mankind as well as for nature. What sustainable development means for different people and places is to be identified in a communicative process of democratic governance.

Post-developmental critique has highlighted the degree to which the allegedly new concept of development is indebted to and in continuity with the familiar equation of growth equavelling development. Again, an economic, social and gender trickle down effect is believed to spread whatever wealth is generated and to bring about political democratisation effects. Rather than providing a genuine alternative sustainable development actually maintains what is referred to as the discursive construction of the Third World in a colonial frame. And in actual fact, I need not remind you to what extent international regimes and conventions striving for ecological sustainability are sidelined in day to day economics and politics. In the world of development, that is the world of so-called donor-agencies and development interaction, we certainly do observe project and programme interventions, that seek to blend ecological, economic, social and political factors of sustainability. But by and large to this day the bottom line is financial sustainability, the question that is who will carry the financial flows that came with the intervention, the community, the market, the government?

### IV.

But that is not the primary aspect I want to conclude my input with. Rather, I would like to stress that we live a dramatic hiatus. Today, it seems to me, there is no model of development, there is no - however deceptive - certainty, there is no promise. There is only the ‘inevitability’ of corporate-driven globalisation and the ready acceptance that it will never be a entire country or society that benefits from ‘development’, i.e. growth. It should be “pro-poor-growth” we are told, but we are

not told what exactly pro-poor means and how it is to be implemented. If there is an articulated strategic operational development concept it is the concept of “capacity for systemic competition” (systemische Wettbewerbsfähigkeit) or, to quote a more pedestrian formula, ‘making developing countries fit for globalisation’ (GTZ). Within that concept the social selectivity of ‘development’ is by and large taken for granted. The World Bank runs an indicator called “speed of integration” (in global markets) which can pretty well be used to measure the growth of exclusion.

For the ‘rest’ of the population we have poverty alleviation and security concerns. I will not go into either one here. The broad connection is clear: in economic growth terms and within the present model of globalisation an ever increasing number of people is structurally superfluous. They just happen to want to live and this very fact contributes to ever increasing instability. We have Millennium Development Goals for 2015, but 11 years away from that date we are already being prepared to live with the fact that the likelihood to achieve them diminishes by the day.

Yet the whole machinery acting in and moving into poverty alleviation and crisis management persistently runs under the logo of development. One is tempted to ask: Is that what it has come to – a mere logo?

## V.

What in the face of all of this do we have to offer? I will not and cannot outline anything coming close to a comprehensive alternative. Rather I would like to point to two discursive strategies that I find of value in countering the prevailing non-development model. I am talking about the concepts of Livelihood and of Global Public Goods. I will readily acknowledge that both have potential pitfalls. The substantial section of the World Bank working on the concept of social capital embraces the concept of livelihood, and this is enough to raise a certain scepticism; Global Public Goods have been invented to rope the private sector into development financing. Yet I still see a certain potential in both concepts.

### Livelihood

Where post-development critique blames developmentalism for its dismal record, it falls prey to the same misjudgement the development community sought to legitimise its existence and expenses with. There is, of course, much more to development than development could ever achieve. In recognition of their systematic limitations, in later years German bilateral and OECD multilateral aid introduced two intermediate and qualifying concepts: policies targeting at structures (*globale Strukturpolitik*) and coherence. The concept of coherence demands the systematic and a priori consideration of development concerns in the pursuit of sectoral policies, thus requiring, as it were, the ‘mainstreaming of development’. Development policy as ‘policies targeting at structures’ attempts to mix its voice meaningfully into the larger debates and actions of trade, finances, investment and the like. I consider this an appropriate though highly risky move.

A paradigm rupture is called for and livelihood could and should serve as alternative frame of reference.

In an immediate linkage between the macro and micro level the concept of livelihood gives direction to macro economics and politics and it does so in a manner which prohibits its confusion with mere survival. Livelihood is conceptually tied to a perspective of entitlements and rights (Sen) including the right to fully develop one's human capacities (Nussbaum) and this of course applies equally to women and men, girls and boys. Livelihood is guided by a concept of human rights that fully accommodates women's rights and thereby gender justice.

As much as serving as a frame of reference and as a normative concept, livelihood has action-oriented openings and direct linkages to social practices and social action. It embraces what in feminist economist term has been dubbed care economy with gender-balanced arrangements between reproductive and productive activities. It entails the objectives of biodiversity and conservation of natural resources. It prioritises local and regional markets and decentralised forms of governance providing more of a chance to genuine participation. It values local resources, local knowledge and cultural diversity.

Would the pursuit of a livelihood approach require the termination of all activities presently running under development? Not necessarily, but it certainly would demand a most thorough revision and redirection.

### Global Public Goods

The debate on Global Public Goods started in 1999 within UNDP circles and situates itself in the context of diminishing ODA and the subsequent move towards Private Public Partnership - a genesis that hardly recommends the concept. However, I do consider it to be of some value. The concept is informed by the previous and continuing debate on the erosion and destruction of the commons in the course of ever pervasive marketization, privatisation and withdrawal of the state. The concept acts as a reminder of something such as a common good which is not delivered by markets and on market terms and yet forms an integral and indispensable part of social life on whichever level of political organization. It reclaims and defends the sphere of genuinely political space, of governance in the sense of democratic structuring, shaping and provisioning of the essential material and immaterial (ecological, technical, social, cultural) prerequisites for the enjoyment of human and citizen's rights.

If for whatever reason – such as neo-liberal abstinence or the transnational nature of economic progress - the nation state fails to act as primary provider or organizer of public goods such as peace, human rights, rule of law, democratic participation, inclusive social justice, or, in more material terms, affordable access to health and education facilities, sport and cultural facilities, or clean water, different levels for problem solving will have to be identified and constructed. The concept of Global Public Goods situates itself a priori on the level of global governance, while at the same time it is of immediate national and local

relevance, for it challenges the dominant neo-liberal discourse with its narrow-minded and merciless focus on economic gains. At whichever level, it holds the potential for a debate on the common good in a globalised world, a debate raising urgent ethical issues and the same time remains immediately linked to aspects of infrastructure, of social provision, and of agency.

## VI.

Finally, another glance at developmentalism or, to be more precise, at the present management of debt servicing capacity running under the heading of poverty alleviation. With the HIPC initiative and the associated PRSP strategy, developing countries meet a bi- and multilateral donor front as unified as ever on neo-liberal grounds. Civil society actors in ‘donor’ countries are invited to come on board and to engage in *capacity building* of their civil society counterparts in developing countries for these to play their part in participatory national ownership. Women’s organisations may also be invited and gender experts are called in to facilitate the gender mainstreaming of the exercise. On a closer look, *capacity building* is another exercise in catching up, in ‘copy and paste’ of the defining societal features that the industrial world takes pride in and deems necessary for the successful passage into ‘development’.

The process claims to be all about Empowerment: Empowering national governments to deal with the poor, empowering the poor to deal with the authorities, empowering women to make their voice heard in all of this. And apart from offering resources otherwise hard to come by, it is, in fact an exercise not without empowering potential and there are, of course, features in Western type societies which rightfully are quite dear to us, not the least and last of them the concept of human rights and its full application to women.

Yet, I think the PRSP encounters and the socio-political context within which they are situated remind us of the need to reassert and sharpen women’s contribution to the respective debates. This is where I think *reclaiming* our concepts in the midst of their appropriation and alienation is not quite enough. Let me stay with the term empowerment. Empowerment is more than the economic self-management of marginalisation which is what the ‘economic empowerment’ of the OECD world boils down to, and more than the ‘active citizen’ who with all his/her activism divests him/herself of claims made on governments. But what empowerment really means today, nearly twenty years after the birth of the concept requires an act of *revisiting*. Many new factors and phenomena impact on a present-day understanding of empowerment, too many to list them with any sense of nearly full coverage (new generations, new meaning of spirituality and religion, new risks), we have to engage in revisiting the meaning of empowerment. I see no one better equipped to do so than the international women’s movements.

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