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Book Review

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ABSTRACT

The last fifty years of economic and political development in Africa have resulted in only limited success. Projects lacking essential components, local institutions unable to sustain the activities once the external input disappears, and local actors responding to external stimuli and strategies rather than becoming agents of their own development are some of the reasons for this limited success. This pattern in Africa contrasts with the successful development in Europe that took place after 1945, and later in countries like Israel, Taiwan, Malaysia and the like. Recently this contrast has inspired a new interest in rights-based development and a search for new paradigms and new opportunities to redefine the relationship that exists between "subjects of development" and the external institutions that seek to help them.

KEYWORDS

Rights-based development – Africa – Social engineering – Poverty alleviation – Foreign aid.

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DEVELOPMENT AND RIGHTS REVISITED: LESSONS FROM AFRICA*

J. Paul Martin

"People cannot be developed;
they can only develop themselves."
Julius Nyerere, 1968

It is becoming customary within the communities of development and human rights to assume that an integration of human rights will make development projects work better.[1] Unfortunately, this issue is much more complex. Imagine a car that has wonderful lines, fine upholstery, a powerful engine and an affordable price, but it also has an unreliable transmission or a defective braking system. No one would buy such a car and the makers would waste no time in fixing the problems. Unfortunately, defects in development projects are not so easily recognized. As beneficial as a rights perspective might be, simply adding human rights to the development mix does not create an adequate recipe for successful development.

This essay argues that the mindset required to build a good car, or a similar all-encompassing mental process, is also badly needed in the social engineering that takes place in political and economic development projects. Development, like the building of a good car, is the end product of multiple scientific and technological input carefully crafted together to make the end product functional, reliable and cost effective. To be successful every development project depends on the input of a range of other things, notably: a minimum of good governance, the rule of law and human rights, adequate local human and physical capacities, appropriate technology, a receptive host community and a minimum of social order, access to required markets,

*Much of the ideas on these pages are distilled from conversations with human rights activists from developing countries.

See the notes to this text as from page 101.

financing, and equipment; and, to make it sustainable, capacity building. Development projects are rarely subjected to systematic pre-evaluations to ensure that all these components are present.

Beginning with the design, such a process requires thorough testing until all its contributors and participants can stand behind it and are willing to be accountable for the end product or products. At this planning stage a development project must be honestly scrutinized to ensure that (a) all the necessary components are there, (b) they work well together, (c) they have the capacity to overcome likely obstacles and respond to changing demand, and that (d) the project can outlive external and other temporary input. If the car analogy is relevant, effective and sustainable development projects call for planning that addresses *all* the elements and takes into account all the above considerations. This might also be called integrated or comprehensive planning, namely planning that takes into account all the details and the most likely outcome.

Development activities have recently received new impulse from such promotional activities as the Millennium Development Goals, the New Economic Plan for Africa (NEPAD) and the US Millennium Fund, which is designed to channel US development funds towards nations that meet higher standards of democracy and rule of law. At the same time the UN Global Compact is calling upon multinational businesses to be more sensitive to the needs of developing countries, and requesting the World Bank to adopt new strategies in its fight against poverty. Are these new perspectives signs that we are entering a more promising era for economic and political development? Or are they merely the re-packaging of traditional paradigms and strategies?

Modern economic and political development derives its inspiration from the Marshall Plan, which was launched in 1947 following World War II. This plan to re-build Europe ushered in the first 'golden era' of modern development activities. Secretary of State George Marshall defined its purpose as "the revival of a working economy in the world so as to permit the emergence of political and social conditions in which free institutions can exist". The US Congress authorized more than $13 billion a year for this purpose between 1948 and 1951, which was close to ten per cent of the annual Federal budget. The United States provided the dollars and Europe provided the infrastructure and the skilled workforce.[2] One of the unforeseen yet most lasting benefits of the program has been the degree to which it has promoted the collaboration and cooperation among participating European states, leading eventually to the European Union and the various other alliances that characterize modern Europe. So successful was the project that it quickly became a metaphor, the normative

paradigm and the model used to advance development programs in other parts of the world.

Over the last fifty years the Marshall Plan paradigm has underpinned, consciously or unconsciously, a myriad of development schemes for other parts of the world. Among success stories where major external investments and other forms of development aid brought strong economic and political growth are countries like Israel and the "Asian tigers," Taiwan, S. Korea, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. As in Europe in 1945, these successful countries all possessed important pre-conditions, for example their skills and educational preparedness; and equally important, their economic and political development were guided by *domestic* political leaders and *domestic* entrepreneurs, albeit assisted by external expertise and financing.

Why then have the economies of the vast majority of the other developing countries languished, when they were also beneficiaries of substantial external financial and technical development aid? Studies have evaluated the reasons why only some, rather than all the other countries have advanced economically and politically. Their findings are extensive, identifying especially the lack of preparedness on the part of recipient countries with respect to their endogenous levels of education, skills, entrepreneurship, infrastructure and government. Where these spheres of preparedness are strong, the recipient countries appear to possess the necessary capabilities to take control of and re-fuel the process of advancement. This contrasts dramatically with the 100 or so of today's poorest countries whose educational systems are not able to locally produce the qualified professionals needed to run the country, nor the skilled workers needed to support more advanced industries. These are countries whose communications, healthcare, utilities and other infrastructure are all inadequate to sustain major investments; and whose governmental institutions, procedures and personnel are poorly adapted to promoting rapid economic change. In many of these countries this situation is accompanied by a sense of fatalism, namely a sense on the part of the citizenship at large that society-wide change is unlikely. In a slightly more optimistic assessment, some of today's parents in Africa accept the fact that although they are a "lost generation" and that nothing will change in their lifetime – they feel they must do something for their children.

Unfortunately this analysis of development in Africa is not new. One has only to read Rene Dumont's classic, *False Start in Africa (L'Afrique noir est mal partie)*, first published in French in 1962.[3] An agronomist by profession, Dumont focuses on the need to integrate Africa's rural populations into national trading economies. He argues that underdevelopment in agriculture seriously affects the entire economy. "It is inseparable from the

lack of industry and underdevelopment in general."[4] "Progress in agriculture should not be considered as a preliminary to industrialization, but an indispensable corollary."[5] His book went on to list all the various factors that have contributed and were continuing to contribute to what he called underdevelopment in Africa. He pointed to the then already widening gap between the population at large and the elites; the badly conceived and administered development programs; and such details as timing the vacation periods of Chad schools to coincide with those in France, rather than with farming cycles in Chad. The continuing value of the analysis is its emphasis on the weak entrepreneurial role played by African communities and on the variety of factors that hindered political and economic development in Africa forty five years ago, and still does today.

The donor and recipient relationship

> *"Freedom won for a people by outsiders is lost to those outsiders, however good their intentions, or however much the outsiders had desired to free their oppressed brothers."*[6]
>
> Julius Nyerere, 1968

Conceptually, the heart of the current development paradigm is that of a relationship between external agents and intended beneficiaries.[7] Putting aside any other implication from adult-child relationships, the development ideal could be compared to the analogy of a child learning to walk. In this analogy the whole effort of the parent is to encourage the child to stand on its own two feet and walk, while the parent provides only the minimum necessary support and then withdraws it as soon as it is safe and possible. At the same time, the parent praises the child's achievements and glories in every independent step the child takes toward self-reliance. Moral physical support continues in various forms until the child develops all the skills needed to cope with its situation and to become self-reliant, self-assured and eventually fully self-supporting. Is this what happens in development programs? Abstracting from the parent image, is this how external development agents operate?

When the model involves external agents and their intended beneficiaries, the most basic issues are the quality and complexity of the relationships between those agents and beneficiaries. This topic has fascinated me ever since I began research on my dissertation, which probed the relationships between the Sotho people and the different groups of European missionaries, traders and administrators who first settled among them, beginning in 1833. Donor-recipient is obviously too simplistic a term to describe these multi-faceted relationships. In this case, the relationships ranged from an intense initial collaboration between the leader of the Sotho, Moshesh, and the

missionaries who quickly launched a translation of the Bible into Sotho, then continued on, even to the deathbed of Moshesh, when the different groups of missionaries were in competition to baptize him.

The modalities and outcomes of these relationships were remarkably rational throughout, in the sense that each party could be seen to use and adapt the relationship, or elements of it, to its own goals. Equally interesting were the ways in which circumstances beyond their control put one or the other in a weaker or stronger position. These relationships evolved long before concepts of development and rights dominated international parlance, but it does illustrate basic relationship components and mutually beneficial outcomes. Among these were, for example, the missionaries making converts and Moshesh preserving his language and maintaining an independent political entity, even in the face of Boer invasions and later *apartheid.* The arrival of the missionaries in 1833, however, was soon followed by the arrival of the traders, who cultivated, and then profited from the Sothos' attraction to such European products as sugar, soap, clothes, horses and guns. The problem was that the Sotho could only acquire those products by working for the Europeans who had access to the needed currency. This set in motion the extensive labor migration patterns that continue to dominate the region until today, and which are, not so parenthetically, a major factor is the continuing spread of HIV/AIDS in the region.

Lesotho thus became a classic worst-case scenario of underdevelopment: an ostensibly independent country whose economy and external relations were soon completely dependent on economic and political forces outside its control. It was too small to build its own economy, and lacked independent financial and technical resources. Labor remittances from those working in South African industries and homes kept families alive, but the funds quickly exited the economy as families spent their income at the local stores owned by expatriate traders. Neither the missionaries nor the British administrators recognized this situation as a problem. The only contentious issue arose in 1881 when the British first decided that the Sotho had bought too many guns, then they decided to disarm the gun owners, resulting in a war of resistance. Today the country's dependence has been further illustrated by a major development project supported by the World Bank, namely a dam system designed to provide more water and electricity to neighboring regions in South Africa than to Lesotho itself.

> *"Man is developing himself when he grows, or earns enough to provide decent conditions for himself and his family; he is not being developed when someone gives him these things."*
>
> Julius Nyerere 1968[8]

Today not all poor countries are as dependent as Lesotho. But they are all caught up in the complex powerful economic and political forces of a global economy beyond their control. The poorest are also targets for development activities initiated by diverse external agents, such as government development agencies, small NGOs, multinational corporations and international organizations like the World Bank and the UNDP. With their limited professional personnel and desperate social needs, the poorest countries are also the least equipped to ensure that outcomes truly benefit all their citizens. With these poorest countries in mind, what would make possible the opening of a new era in economic and political development? Is a new paradigm necessary? Possible?

Some of the most debated dimensions of the North-South relationship are those comprised of legal and ethical questions. One issue is whether, on the part of rich countries, a legal or moral obligation exists to help poor countries. This debate appeared during negotiations at the UN that led to the passing in 1981 of the Declaration on the Rights to Development; and more recently in a proposal by development economists for a development compact which would impose obligations on both the rich donor nations and recipients.[9] Such an obligation might have been hinted about in the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights when it mentioned development being dependent on international support.[10] In practice any imposition of obligation has been – and will no doubt continue to be – resisted by the richer nations.

The actual physical and attitudinal aspects of the relationship are most visible between donor and intended beneficiary when the relationship is literally face-to-face, namely, on the ground in the developing country. With the exception of senior government officials, the in-country external agents and especially the visiting consultants typically live very different lifestyles, benefit from very different levels of income, and have a very different pattern of commitment to the project than do their domestic partners. What is not so obvious is the impact that these visible differences have on the outcome of any given project. Also at issue are the patterns of accountability, and the degree to which local partners are in fact empowered to engage and take over from the in-country external agents. Equally relevant but generally unmeasured is the impact of intangibles, such as attitudes of one toward the other.

Most of us who work in developing countries are familiar with the disparaging remarks expressed by local personnel as they watch the work of external agents whom they know will be paid, no matter what the outcome. Similarly, one also hears remarks by local professionals who feel they could do the job equally well. In fact it is not uncommon to find experts working

in countries other than their own for international salaries, rather than doing the same work in their home country for a local salary. One is also familiar with the local personnel and NGOs who acknowledge that their priorities are largely defined by whether or not they will provide access to the external aid funds coming into the country. These are all modalities, and I would argue undesirable modalities, that, with alternative paradigms, need not be seen as inevitably associated with contemporary externally driven development.

Where do human rights fit in?

> *"A man can defend his rights effectively only when he understands what they are, and how to use the constitutional machinery which exists for the defense of those rights – and knowledge of this kind is part of development."*
>
> Julius Nyerere 1968[11]

Rights are usually promoted on normative grounds, namely that human activities are necessarily governed by moral and legal standards. The right to life, for example, means that no one can take away another's life with impunity except through following some society-sanctioned proces s, self-defense, or in a legal war. Rights that can be claimed universally by all human beings are deemed human rights, no matter what their circumstances, and these claims are established in international law. Thus the corpus of human rights laws elaborated by the UN in the past fifty years legitimately governs, *inter alia*, all development projects and those who would promote them.

Recent writings have identified those rights that are most likely to be jeopardized by economic and political underdevelopment. Such a list would be premised on an overall definition of the goal of development as human development. Rights as defined in the UN Bill of Rights can be used as criteria to measure the human impact of poverty. Included in this normative approach to integrating human rights into development is the instrumental role of rights in the development process itself. This view emphasizes the ways in which civil and political rights on one side, and economic and social rights on the other, are interdependent. Development strategists are thus urged to incorporate in their plans mechanisms to assure accountability, transparency, participatory decision-making, non-discrimination and attention to vulnerable groups, social justice, equity, and empowerment.[12] Human freedom, for example, is seen as both a goal and a means towards development.[13] The danger is that this all adds up to a hefty set of demands, which can easily be portrayed as beyond the resources of a poor government, as well as beyond the mandate of international development agencies or private sector initiatives.

The Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, in its second article, emphasizes that it is an obligation of government to implement these rights, and recognizes that this process will take time, but that that a government must show progress in implementing rights. It must also use a maximum of available resources.

> *"Without freedom you get no development, and without development you soon lose your freedom."*
>
> Julius Nyerere[14]

This integrated view of human rights is supported by Amartya Sen[15] who pointed out that human rights, and in his opinion more specifically human freedom, are both the goal and the necessary means; that human development is best attained with human freedom as part of the agency. Human beings able to exercise freedom are more likely and more expeditiously able to achieve greater freedom and thus greater human development. Sen advances empirical arguments for his case based on his earlier findings that throughout history societies with democratic practices have not suffered from severe famine. Other economists such as Jagdish Bhagwati[17] argue that this combination of development and democracy is further promoted by outward-oriented trade policies. His argument is that trade contributes to the observance of civil and political rights, which in turn can be shown to contribute to the economic well-being of an entire society. Only a growing economy can provide the additional resources needed to improve healthcare and education, which in turn are needed to further enrich citizens' capacity to exercise their rights.

There seems to be strong evidence to show that participatory political processes provide the necessary space for the advocacy activities of civil society, notably by NGOs. In developing countries, with limited public education, active and effective domestic NGOs bring knowledge of human rights abuses to public attention more quickly, thus also bring their redress more expeditiously. NGOs are the eyes and ears of socially progressive legislation, argues Jagdish Bhagwati.[17] Their energy has appeared as especially important with respect to some major development schemes, such as the Narmada Dam project in India, and with respect to recent activities in many parts of the world attempting to privatize water supplies. As illustrated in the case of the Chad-Cameroon pipeline, by working with international NGOs, local NGOs can make issues visible to the international community and thus influence the actions of external agents; notably in this case those of Exxon-Mobil and the World Bank.[18] However, the advocacy roles of local NGOs depend upon their actually enjoying

such rights as freedom of association, assembly, speech, access to information etc.

Typically the response of governments to this human rights advocacy is defensive. A high percentage of governments in poor countries regard local and international human rights NGOs with hostility. Some see the NGOs as vehicles of the opposition, or of ethnic or other minorities. Others see NGOs as hostile to the national image, because they collect data and publish overseas reports on abuses that portray the country in an unfavorable light. Others object to NGOs receiving funding from overseas, or even portray the NGOs as being tools of hostile external interests. Others paint NGOs as frustrating legal processes by their being too supportive of the formal rights of criminal processes. Rarely do governments of developing countries see NGOs as working together with them in common tasks to maximize development benefits for their country. Governments therefore ought to recognize that their civil society is an important source of the local entrepreneurship and initiative needed to promote not only their countries' economic growth, but also it's political development.

The paradigm proposed here emphasizes the potential in development planning of rights such as individual freedoms and local community participation. Human rights advocacy is only part of the development process. Human rights are, on one hand, a goal, but they are also a part of the process that leads to development. Truly rights-based processes, on the other hand, lead to processes that assure greater economic and political emancipation in the local communities. The challenge today is, however, to make the rights-based approach effective within specific social circumstances. Advocates for human rights must therefore educate themselves about how economic and social institutions work and how they can be used to reduce all types of human rights abuses. Education, and human rights education in particular, are core elements of human rights advocacy and a rights-based development strategy. These forms of education focus on capacity building, that is, putting into place the institutions and personnel able to sustain both the learning and the practices needed to commence and sustain self-reliant, rights-based development.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to identify human rights as both goals and means in processes to facilitate economic and political emancipation of communities that have been marginalized, and which are still benefiting little from global economics. The emphases have been on (a) the need for inclusive social engineering that develops blueprints that address all the elements, and

(b) a rights-based approach that emphasizes self-help, self-reliance and the input that best encourages such a strategy. Nyerere was able to enunciate the philosophical premises of this paradigm, but he was not able to create the necessary economic and political institutions for the implementation of these processes at the national level. As in the analogy of the car; ideas are not enough. Good will and even hard work are only two of the necessary components. Social science research is not enough. Social engineering for development in Africa needs a detailed new blueprint as well as capacity building at all levels.

Given the limited achievements (compared with other parts of the world) over the last 50 years in the externally-driven development in Africa, a radical change is called for in the paradigms that govern relationships among the indigenous actors, the external agents and the financial institutions. This is not yet visible in the financial provisions of current development planning. Greater priority needs to be given to encouraging and protecting the nascent responsive indigenous forces (individuals, communities, institutions, industries, professionals, etc.), until they are capable of dealing with their more powerful counterparts outside the country. This calls for a new generation of economic planning, for example, one that prevents the precious funds that reach a given country from being quickly, legally and illegally, re-cycled out. Many such pieces need to be in place if development is going to begin to emancipate the world's poorest peoples, both politically and economically. The rights-based approach must, however, be integrated into detailed blueprints that are comprehensive enough to assure more successful individual projects and national development planning.

NOTES

1. Center for Development and Human Rights, *The right to development*: *A primer*, New Delhi, Sage Publications, 2004, available at <www.hsph.harvard.edu/fxbcenter/flyer.pdf>, access on March 28, 2006.

2. See for example, Alan Milward, *The Reconstruction of Western Europe, 1945-51,* Berkeley, University of California Press, 1984.

3. Rene Dumont, *False Start in Africa*, New York, Praeger, 1966.

4. Dumont, op. cit., p. 31

5. Dumont, op. cit., p.32

6. Julius K. Nyerere, *Man and Development* (Speech to Diplomats, 1, January 1968, Nairobi), New York: Oxford University Press, 1974, p.3.

7. For an extensive discussion of insider-outsider relations see Lara Olson, "Confronting War: Critical Lessons for Peace Practitioners", in: Mary B. Anderson and Lara Olson, *Reflecting on Peace Practice Project, Collaborative for Development Action* (with the Collaborative for Development Action in Cambridge, Massachussetts), 2003.

8. Julius K. Nyerere, op. cit., 1974, p. 27.

9. See Arjun Sengupta, "On the Theory and Practice of the Right to Development," *Human Rights Quarterly*, v. 24, 2002, p. 880.

10. Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, article 11 and article 23.

11. Julius K. Nyerere, op. cit.,1974, p.27.

12. Centre for Development and Human Rights, op. cit., 2004.

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