

DEVELOPMENT: A STUDY OF PARADIGM SHIFT

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ABSTRACT

There is no one definition of 'development'. It is generally taken to mean the growth of an individual, society, a nation, or entire world in terms of both economic and non-economic activities. Development has many connotations. It can be an end state, when we say we want development. It can be a process or activities through which certain goals are sought to be achieved. Development activities in agriculture are undertaken to improve production and create more jobs. When we talk of people's participation in development, we refer to the process aspect of 'development'.

KEYWORDS: Growth, Development, Paradigm Shift, Participation

FIRST GENERATION DEVELOPMENT THOUGHT

Discourse on 'Development' started, when the 'third world' was born after the liquidation of colonialism. The national leaders in India, Indonesia and other Afro-Asian countries, immediately after 'independence' expressed their concern about 'development'! Nehru, Nkrumah, Nyerere- all desired speedy socio-economic change to get rid of inequality, poverty, ill-health, malnutrition, and different forms of social oppression and economic deprivation. At the initial phase, 'Development' was conceived in technical terms. Production of food grains, creation of irrigation facilities, construction of roads and buildings and all other production and infrastructural expansion activities called for technical expertise, planning, management and directions from above. In the fifties, when 'Development' set out its journey, the search was for 'goods' and 'things'. Roads, buildings, dams, fertilizer, wheat, rice- these were the targets. 'Development' meant top-directed 'planned' activities to produce or construct these 'things'.

The first generation development thought was influenced by 'modernization theory' whose central issues were 'growth'. The third world was to pursue the path of development which meant, in essence, industrialisation and urbanisation to emulate the life style of the western developed nations. The euphoria of 'growth' orientation subsided when it was realised in the 70s and the 80s that 'development' did not remove poverty and inequality. The quality of life, so far as the general masses were concerned showed no signs of substantial improvement. There was a growing realisation that 'Development' has been unnecessarily technicised and dehumanised. As leaders like Nyerere reminded us, people cannot be developed, they develop themselves. What was needed was to redirect efforts towards people their genuine 'empowerment'. People's knowledge about their own conditions and ecosystems was based on their long life experience. People, given proper opportunity, can improve their own conditions and at the same time, take care of the eco-system

within which their life is embedded. The Earth Summit at Rio de Janeiro (1992) drew attention to the urgency of enlisting people's participation and using people's knowledge to save 'environment' and 'ecology'. The people, specially the poor, all of a sudden emerged as the main actor in development. The call was to put first the diverse priorities of the poor people, and it was claimed by experts that to understand and support these were equitable (helping people gain what they want), efficient (mobilizing their creative energy), and sustainable (providing incentives for long-term self-reliant investments by the poor). While events, nationally and internationally, were inexorably driving development thought towards 'people' (as distinguished from 'things'), conflicting view persisted, befogging the vision of development.

PARADIGM OF REVERSAL

'Development' thinking has never been free from biases – be it, 'urban bias' or anything else. Disciplinary approaches of professionals have often been conditioned by their special professional outlook. An economist looking at rural poverty has his distinctive quantitative, projective bias, just as an expert in management science pays special attention to policies, programmes and projects – their formulation, execution, monitoring and evaluation. Sociologist and anthropologist have their own analytical tool-kit like, for instance, the 'moral economy; concept or the idea of primordial loyalties binding different groups in diverse relational ties.

Development 'watchers' have their own perceptions about people in micro-spaces where the poor live. As earlier stated, the first generation developmentalists in the 1950s viewed the micro-space and its people as elements in economic planning and in terms of local resources mobilization. The same view persisted with some changes later, invoking more field-orientation and people's participation in development. As it has been aptly put; "in the 1950, blueprints for development were drawn up from an 'aeroplane' perspective. In the 1970s, the

field-oriented, participatory approach prompted a ‘helicopter’ vision, for the experts sitting in the low-flying craft could now claim to have a more accurate perception of their target population. They could even land anywhere amongst the people below to enquire about their views.”(Chambers, 1983)

What is important to note is that the change from ‘aeroplane’ to ‘helicopter’ did not essentially alter the old, top-down vision of reality. The experts, in both cases, thought that “they knew better than the ‘underdeveloped’ populations living down below”. In development theorising and practices, perceptions of micro-spaces have often been influenced by ‘the field of knowledge and power dominant in political and developmental circles.’(Majid, 1988)

It is in this context that the idea of ‘reversals’ as mooted by Robert Chambers, assumes crucial significance. To quote Chambers: “For the rural poor to lose less and gain more requires *reversals* : spatial reversals in where professionals live and work, and in decentralisation of resources and discretion, reversals in professional values and preferences, from a ‘first’ to a last ‘list’, and reversals in specialisation, enabling the identification and exploitation by and for the gaps-under-recognised resources, and opportunities often lying between disciplines, professions and departments. Reversals require professionals who are explorers and multidisciplinarians, those who ask, again and again, who will benefit and who will lose from their choices and actions.”

The paradigm of ‘reversals’, as propounded by Chambers, looks at field realities-ecosystems, farming systems, or livelihood strategies—as non-linear, adaptive, and differentiating. Hence Development, in this view, is decentralised and divergent, bureaucracy and markets centralize, standardise and simplify. By contrast, ecosystem and livelihood strategies become more stable and sustainable by becoming more complex and diverse.(Chambers 1990)

In this connection, it is worth noting that Robert Chambers has entitled the first chapter of his book *Rural Development: Putting the Last First as ‘Rural Poverty Unperceived’*. As he quotes the old English proverb : ‘What the eye does not see, the heart does not grieve about’, how does the planner, or the rural specialist perceive the rural situation generally and rural poverty in particular? His solutions flow from his perception. The perception riddle that creates distinct biases, has been very succinctly explained by Chambers in the following words :

“Outsider under perceive rural poverty. They are attracted to and trapped in urban ‘cores’ which generate and communicate their own sort of knowledge while rural ‘peripheries’ are isolated and neglected. The direct rural experiences of most urban based outsider is limited to the brief and hurried visits, from urban centres, of rural development tourism. These exhibit six bases against contact with and

learning from the poorer people. These are *spatial*- urban, tarma and roadside; *project* –towards places where there are projects; *person* – towards those who are better off, men rather than women, users of services and adopters of practices rather than non-users and non-adopters, and those who are active, present and living; *seasonal*- avoiding the had times of the wet season; *diplomatic*- not seeking out the poor for fear of giving offence; and *professional* –confined to the concerns of the outsider’s specialisation. As a result, the poorer rural people are little seen and even less is the nature of their poverty understood.”(Chambers, 1983) Hence, what chambers has advocated is the need for perceptual reorientation : a paradigm of ‘reversals’.

NEW ORIENTATION

It is a truism to say that development has always been a multi-objective phenomenon. In practice, over the years, the objectives of development have been changing from productivity or growth orientation to poverty-amelioration and social justice to be secured with people’s participation. The oft-cited top-down approach has long been discredited as the common diagnosis has been that the variegated local situation that has to be treated by “development” is not amenable to standard bureaucratic and mechanical measures. Alongside this, the development professional like Chamber have realised from long field involvement that ‘development’ has to be people centered, and what is needed therefore is “to reverse the tendency towards concentrating power in impersonal and unaccountable institutions. For development to be locally meaningful, power needs to be returned to the people and communities through the creation of member-accountable institutions and strengthening of local resources control and ownership.”

Strangely enough, reorientation in development thinking has, by and large, remained clustered in academic circles. The world of practice has been living a fairly autonomous life supported by extant political and bureaucratic structures. The paradigm shift from the growth-centric approach to the people centric one needs corresponding institutional reshaping that is hard to bring about at one stroke. Yet, development theory and practice are moving inexorably towards the people-centric mode.

The institutional rigidities are grounded in the continued acceptance of a concept of ‘development’ that is basically top-generated and top-directed. ‘Development’ is what the “Centre” visions and plans. Since power and resources have been traditionally centralised, and bureaucratic control has dominated public organisations, existence of knowledge, resources, and capacity at the local level is ruled out by definitional fiat. All wisdom and science can be found only at the centre, and there is nothing at the periphery!

THE DISTORTIONS

Micro-level planning, so far announced from the top, has been a centrally guided and straight-jacketed proforma planning. It is a convenience of the centre and not the will and needs of the localities, that has been the motive force behind the central advocacy of micro-level planning.

“Development” in this context has meant implementation of a conjured up central vision of what is to be done at the periphery. It has, naturally, bred uniformity, standardization, guide-line dictated “planned” activities across the nation. Local diversities in terms of resources, people and culture cannot be accommodated in this streamroller approach to development. So, one finds JRY, EAS and all other kinds of programmes in every nook and corner of the country.

The standard vision emanating from the centre has sedulously nurtured almost a pathological structure of verticalism. The programmes – be it JRY or EAS or any other thing – have their taproots at the top, and these are passed on to the field agencies for implementation via the state and its operating departments. There are two kinds of verticality that reinforce centre-domination and therefore local atrophy. One kind of verticality is schemes or programmes related. The other kind is department- related, which also runs from top to bottom. The JRY-kind of scheme weaves its own vertical order. An activity by a department such as Forest Department or Irrigation Department would be usually having its origin in state budgetary allocation. When the Forest Department is engaged in forest-related ‘development’, it is the departmental vision of development which is necessarily sectoral. There are several such sectoral development activities that cut “development” into pieces. Linkages among sectors or integrating the different sectoral investment (e.g. soil conservation and forest development) would, in such circumstances go naturally by default. There are many piecemeal developments, but no holistic ‘development’. What has actually happened in the world of planning is a kind of unholy alliance between schemes and departments. ‘Development’ has thus been departmentalised. Departmental orthodoxy is hard to break even in normal times; on top of it, ‘development’ has been further fuelling single line piecemeal schematic activities without much care for interweaving and harmonising area-development efforts. Occasionally, lamentations are heard about ‘balkanization’ of development and the familiar rostrum invariably suggested has been ‘convergence’!

If the verticality of programmes and departmental activities has fractured ‘development’, the hierarchical structure of the PRIs (Panchayati Raj Institutions) has tended to fragment the local will. The three-tier PRI structure is politically hierarchic, ‘power’ being distributed in a graded fashion between the zilla parishad, and its constituents : panchayat samiti and the gram panchayat.

The programmes (e.g. JRY, EAS etc.) are also situated at different locations. Activities that have to be undertaken at the local gram panchayat level are often dependent for their start and supervision on either the panchayat samiti or the zilla parishad. Fund flow from the higher to lower tiers would many a time be erratic and irregular, creating in the process bottlenecks in on-going operations at the local level. Autonomous local action at the gram panchayat level in terms of its own need-based planning, funding and implementation is at present, not desired by the ‘system’ in vogue.

The scenario that emerges at this stage is one of multiple interests tending to pre-empt local initiative for local micro-level planning and development. The autonomy of ‘locality’ is hedged about, and there are currents and cross currents that are constantly muddying local development.

73rd CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

The 73rd constitutional Amendment, against this background breathes a new spirit of genuine locality-inspired local development. At the same time it is sure to release institutional shocks that would reverberate across the board in governmental circles and the PRI hierarchy.

The constitutional scheme envisaged in the 1992 Amendment is to institute ‘self-government’ at the panchayat level that will bring about economic development with social justice through micro-level planning. The locality being the basis of community life will form the foundation – in which will rise the superstructure of ‘development’. It will be a ‘totalising’ enterprise, as distinguished from the traditionally pursued ‘partial’, schematic and disparate activities. So long, the will of the locality had been superseded by a host of anonymous supra local authorities.

The locality has been a dumping ground of schemes and projects from above. Henceforward, as the constitutional amendment provides, the genetic code of planning will inhere in the locality – the gram panchayat and its constituent gram sansads. Planning for the locality will now be substituted by planning by the locality, firmly establishing, thereby, the proprietorial right of the local people to plan for themselves.

Once the original status of authentic micro-level planning by the panchayat will be gaining in legitimacy, it is higher level planning that has to justify its existence in the context of panchayat planning. The concept of ‘decentralised planning’ has all along apotheosised the ‘centre’. Basically, the image is one of locational change of planning from centre downward. The concept has never accepted the propriety of the locality as the originator of planning. In terms of the new institutional design as crafted by the 73rd constitutional amendment, planning is not ‘decentralised’, it is housed in its proper place – the local community. Locality planning is envisaged as original planning, at all other levels planning will

be 'derivative' and not original. In a way, therefore, micro-level planning at the panchayat level bids farewell to 'decentralised planning'. If it actually materialises, a set of conditions is likely to be created to release people's energy that will facilitate taking control of local resources by the people to make their own kind of authentic grassroots planning. 'Development', which belongs really to the people, will at last be rehabilitated.

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