

AN OVERVIEW OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT*

Suntaree Komin

Introduction

The increasing awareness and concern in Asian developing countries, particularly among the Asian academic circles, about the state and effects of development as it is occurring, has triggered off a series of questions calling for a rethinking of the concept of development in general, and the emergence of social development in particular. This article attempts to capture an overview of social development which covers its sources of emergence, assumptions and rationale of social development and the Research Center's conception of social development.

The emergence of social development stems from the unsatisfactory results of development, due to its not-so-comprehensive, economic deterministic conception of development models, which Asian developing countries have been uncritically relying upon. The development models, which have been predominantly based on the economic conception of growth in terms of GNP, percapita income, production, physical growth and technological growth, have not produced adequate and satisfactory development results particularly for non-Western societies. For one thing, development objectives have troubles reaching the intended rate and magnitude of growth. For another, even with the measurable amount of overall growth, it was found to germinate increasing inequality rather than balanced growth. It happens in reality that a substantial part of development gains is clustered at the thin upper crust of the society, consisting of those who control the means of production and the parasital class around them. While the core directing economic activities reaps tremendous advantages, the periphery which comprises the masses remains poor and untouched, having at best only some notional share in the social services provided by the government. The gap between the rich and the poor widened, and the poverty problems remain unsolved.

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A situation exists in many developing countries today that, while economic development is nevertheless far-off on its way, other aspects of development are left much behind, sending waves of repercussions in all directions. Political development is struggling almost in vain towards some model of democracy, away from anarchism. Political elites in these countries are still unable to conceptualize clearly the objectives of their societies and/or unable to affect desirable changes. The failure to instill a true democratic society for example, indicates the limitation of transplanting externally-induced ideas or institutional changes, especially when the existing power stands in the way, and/or the bulk of the people are not sufficiently appreciative or not receptive to the need for such ideas or changes. It also indicates the inadequacy of the compartmentalized, economic deterministic, sequential model of development, whereby economic development precedes other aspects of development. It is more than evident that the local social cultural systems as dynamic driving forces have been neglected or even obliterated in the process of development. The failure of the economic conception of development led to the formulation of a broader social, cultural, and political conception of development in the academic circle.

Social development

The upsurge of interest in 'social development' in the aftermath of a period of unchallenged predominance of 'economic development' has led to a rethinking of development. This itself is not an easy task. There is no agreement among scholars about the precise meaning of this term. All it implies is some kind of improvement in the lives of the people in the society which is developing or has developed. Some define it narrowly to include only the aspects of economic development, while some others include in it everything pertaining to the realization of the human potential to embrace all aspects of human life -- social, cultural economic, political, etc. What should be the coverage of social development? Does it refer to anything 'non-economic', or the sectoral approach to 'social planning', or in fact an alternative foci rather than supplementary foci of developmental concern? If we take society, then social development should hardly be reduced to technological or economic development only, although the former implies the latter. In the process of searching for social development, critical questions have been raised with regard to the adequacy of the existing development paradigms and their derivations, the redefinition of development and modernization, and the determination of what should be the development aims : (a) **growth**; (b) **change**; (c) **social justice**; or, (d) **quality of life**, or all?

The existing development paradigms and their derivations can be seen through the significant changes of the definitions of development during the past

decade. Viewing from the sociology of development point of view, the conception of development in the academic has gone through four phases (Baviskar, 1982) :

(1) Phase one was characterized by capital and technical know-how elements of development, whereby society, culture, and people were considered to be passive organism, ever-adjusting to the development process and environment. It was a period of 'impact' studies -- the economic and technological impact upon the people, the community, institutions, and culture.

(2) Phase two was marked by the search for social prerequisites of economic development, as a result of the increasing disillusion with economic planning which failed to produce desired results. Development did not take place. Social scientists were asked to lay down social, cultural and psychological prerequisites for development to occur. Concerns of this phase were represented by works of Hoselitz (1960), Moors (1965), McClelland (1961), and others. Their works involved discussions of the emergence of right values, attitudes, motives and abilities which would be favorable to the process of development. It is virtually an imposition of Western development prerequisites upon the developing societies.

(3) Phase three was dominated by modernization theories which were virtually imbedded with Anglo-American model of society. It was a continuation and systematization on a grand scale of the second phase, characterized by the booming of tradition-modernity scheme.

(4) Phase four was marked by the emergence of the school of under-development and dependency, which emphasizes the historical factor of colonialism and imperialism as the root cause of poverty and backwardness of the third world countries, the importance of class factor in the process of development, and the influencing international economic order. This school of thought advocates only an ultimate solution based upon the creation of class consciousness and the bringing about of a socialist revolution

Works of these four orientations and their modifications still carry on. Some seems to move towards a deadend, others might become more promising. Viewing social development from a disciplinary perspective, one can see differential emphases. Political scientists outlined three dimensions of political development : 'equality' which includes the transition in attitude from subject to active citizen, greater reliance upon achievement rather than ascription, universalistic and impersonal rules and laws rather than particularistic ; 'capacity' meaning the rational organization of administration, and increase in the capabilities of the political system ; 'differentiation', which involves structural specialization, and the integration of roles and structure. (Pye, 1968 ; Almond, 1965). Sociologists view society as advancing from a simple to a complex state through a process of differentiation and adaptation. The sociology of development becomes a question of identifying and analysing the social, cultural, and psychological changes associated with economic development and

industrialization in terms of such dimensions as social values (communally oriented values versus individualistic achievement orientated values), social organization (extended family versus nuclear family), occupational structure, social class and social mobility, urbanization, communications. These represent a relatively conventional set of dimensions. Another strand of sociological theory focused more directly on the relations between social groups and between societies, and on such issues as social cohesion and social conflict, and on the capacity of society to integrate and organize the interests and pressures of different social groups. This approach, which brings the interests of sociologists close to those of political scientists, is reflected for example in Deutsch's theory of social mobilization and political development (Deutsch, 1961).

Should social development be conceived of merely as process of changes -- in structure and institutions as well as growth, or product -- towards certain selected goals and ends? Here again, the important question is whose desirable ends and goals? For development to be meaningful, it is not just change but is related to development values. The distinction here is between development as a normative concept, and development as an empirical process of change. It is argued that development is necessarily a normative concept, and involves values, goals and standards which make it possible to compare a present state against a preferred one. This immediately raises the question of whose values and goals are to be taken into account in assessing development. Planner's values or people's values? Market values or politically determined values?

To what extent is it possible to draw on the theoretical models in order to define the relevant categories or components for a conceptual model of social development? The difficulty is, that while there is no shortage of models or partial models at the present time (be it economic or political models), there is no agreement about a general model of development in general, and social development in particular. Evidently, the generality, ambiguity, and implicit value judgement involved in the concept of development pose difficulties in arriving at a neatly defined conceptual framework of social development. Nevertheless, viewing the strength and weaknesses of various conceptions, approaches, and the question of development aims, one cannot help but to enlarge the concept of social development -- one that would capture the fullness of social reality. At this point, while the emergence of a social development model is still in the process of being formulated, a few assumptions and facts regarding social development need to be stated to serve as the rationale for social development framework. They are as follows :

(1) The ultimate goal of development is **people**. People are not only the resources for developmental purposes, but are also simultaneously the beneficiaries of development. The benefits should not only be in quantitative economic terms, but also in social terms which are often qualitative in nature. Changes brought about

by modernization, affect people's behavior, attitudes and values and their relationship with one another; and unless these changes can be harmonized with their traditional life style and their local cultural systems, they will be victims rather than the beneficiaries of the new economic and social order envisaged by the development measures.

(2) Development is a process in which social progress is not only a "factor", but in many important respects actually an arbiter and prerequisite of economic growth. This idea is gaining respectability among the rising generation of Asian development planners, and theoreticians, and is most commonly expressed in terms of support for an "institutional" approach to development -- advocating for an integrated whole of a development theory, taking account of both the economic and non-economic social factors. They are interrelated and cannot be considered or planned independently of each other as has been practiced up to the very recent time.

(3) In the present state of development planning, the "social aspect of development" is at worst totally discounted, or at best, inadequately or irrelevantly addressed. One can see even when "social planning" is administratively recognized as a special function, it is interpreted very largely in terms of conventional sectoral approaches to the improvement of levels of live (i.e., such as programs in health, education and social welfare, and hardly at all from the viewpoint of promoting a cohesive structural and institutional change). And it is seen as a function entirely subordinated to "economic" planning, which invariably constitutes the major designated concerns of the development planning at the national level. In actuality, economic planning and social planning are still widely regarded as dichotomous disciplines and development is not fully appreciated as an organized process calling unified planning in which economic and non-economic variables are simultaneously accounted for.

(4) Most significantly, development in many Asian countries have been based on quite uncritical extrapolation from Western experiences and economic theory, with insufficient or no allowances being made for the fundamentally different circumstances of the Asian societies. Such a unilateral imposition of models from one society to another is fruitless and can be hazardous. Western development theories or models incorporate the existence of Western political, social and cultural frameworks which are conducive to economic growth. In Asian countries, such frameworks do not exist yet or might just begin to emerge with different patterns. Therefore, applications of Western theories often result in "rejection reactions". Furthermore, the Western development model also implies certain sequential process of development, dominated by economic determinism -- economic development precedes development in other aspects. As demonstrated by Western experiences, modernization, urbanization, a rise in literacy and exposure to mass media occur in a particular sequence, raising popular participation in economic and political life. When this sequence is disturbed, modernization fails to occur.

The Research Center's conception of social development*

From the above rationale, the Research Center conceives of social development as composite of the following premises :

(1) That people are both the resources for and the beneficiaries of developmental purposes. Without this conscious recognition, there is a tendency to consider people only as resources for development.

(2) That development is the development of people in society as active participants in the development process, determining the means and goals of development.

(3) That social development as a dynamic social change process involves maintaining the equitable level of seeking of opportunities and providing opportunities, between people and institutions.**

(4) That changes brought by modernization and development should be in harmony with the local cultural systems in the people's capability for accommodation or replacement, viewing people as a dynamic cultural product capable to engineer changes at will, rather than as a static target of being changed.

(5) That the presumed sequential process of development with economic determinism is inadequate, and that modernization and development is not a unilinear and universal process, rather it can be multilinear and cultural/historical specific.

(6) That modernity and tradition are not mutually exclusive cluster of attributes, but they have complex relationships.

(7) That the three components of social development -- economic, political, and social-cultural -- are interpenetrated. There assumes no additive relations between the three components, but there are interactions among them. The combination, the magnitude and the patterns of interactions among these components constitute the uniqueness of a culture. And it is the maintaining or balancing between the uniqueness of the local culture and the planned development and change in the desired direction and at the desired rate, that should be the goal of social development of that culture.*

(8) That there need not be a separate development model or theory for each particular culture, but the model should predominantly based on specific local realities. Common variables and process across societies might emerge subsequently.

(9) That the uniqueness of the particular cultural group be referred more to the intrinsic cultural nature of people that should be understood and utilized to motivate development. This uniqueness, when neglected often generates obstructions to change and development.

*The Research Center of the National Institute of Development Administration.

**Dr. Titaya Suvanajata is the major proponent of such premises.

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