

# What's in a Word? Development in Harmony or Conflict?

ANDERS NÄRMAN

*University of Gothenburg, Sweden*

*...everyone, it seems, knows what development is except the experts.*

(Stöhr and Taylor 1981:453)

Development is in itself a value-loaded concept. It is used for some kind of change, in what is perceived as a positive direction. In countries, at least previously, classified as belonging to the Third World numerous **development** plans are formulated to guide a **development** process. High on the list of national priorities we often find a policy for rural **development**.

From the northern rich members of the global community a helping hand is given to the less fortunate ones, taking the form of **development** assistance. One of the latest catch-words in this connection to safe-guard "our common future" is sustainable **development**.

However, all evidence seem to point to the fact that we are not achieving any kind of **development**, at least not in a more universal sense. What we for long have been told is that the so called **developing** countries are not really **developing**. At least not the poorest among them, neither the nations nor the people. **Development** assistance seem to nurture the most well-off, leaving out the main *target group*, which is said to be *the poorest of the poor*. To discuss any sustainability in a world depleting all its resources in an accelerating pace can be nothing but a joke.

This paper is offering a brief discourse on the concept of development, placed in a global, national and local structure of conflict. Thereafter, the perspective outlined is adopted on a concrete example, e.g. the agricultural policy in Zimbabwe.

## 1. DEVELOPMENT IN AN UNHARMONIOUS ENVIRONMENT

From a developmental point of view the present trends are definitely portraying a gloomy picture. We have left a stage of euphoria on this account and entered a period of crisis. The dilemma is further accentuated due to the fact that the social sciences have been virtually impotent in their attempts to diagnose the problems and finding the right prescription for an actual recovery. Too often it has been claimed that we as researchers have been good at exploring the symptoms of the disease, but not the causes. Sometimes there is also a serious mix-up of what is the cause and what is the effect.

For social sciences to be able to play a more active role in the study of development a prerequisite is that we are more clear over what it is all about. If we are not able to define the concept of development in a uniform manner, how is it then possible to contribute to an objective understanding of what it implies? Or even more, how do we give inputs to the formulation of a strategy to overcome underdevelopment?

Development is a word surrounded with a varied set of normative considerations. Within any field of research it is impossible to free oneself from ideological convictions. For the development researcher this is only more visible, as it touches more directly on the central focus for the studies conducted.

Even if we discard the notion that economic growth and modernization is at the very heart of development it is difficult to avoid this pair of indicators for a description of what we talk about. After all, as development researchers, irrespective if we are originally from Europe or Africa, we all live in the "modern" world with all its material advantages. To transform ourselves psychologically into being an "*insider*" in rural Africa is almost an impossible task (Chambers 1983:2-27)

To be able to regain some kind of credibility in development research we must start questioning the whole conventional thinking within the field. The cautious notion that we cannot throw out the baby with the bath water has to be given up. Not only are we to throw out the baby, but the whole bath tub as well, if need be.

It seem like something of an irony that we are still listening to the advice given by economists before any others in matters concerning development. After all what positive effects have they contributed with in form of practical political guidance to the poor nations of the world for the last half century? The culture of economics have transformed itself into something of a leading religion of development. A claim for scientific objectivity make normative issues irrelevant to the solutions based on economics.

It is difficult to imagine how the present structural adjustment programmes imposed on to Africa and the Africans will, even in the long run, benefit the poorest segment of the societies. Undoubtaly the economic situation in Africa is in an extremely depressed state of affair, but is the World Bank/IMF free market philosophy really the right way to correct it? In our society built on individualistic achievements it might be acceptable, but hardly in the African reality with a strong traditional respect for collective efforts.

During a seminar with one of the bilateral donor agencies in Harare in June 1992 it was said, by a senior official, that they had decided to believe in the structural adjustment programmes. However, he could not mention any empirical evidence pointing to any successful outcome of such programmes. It is rather with the arrogance of the powerful, that what is good for the ones without a voice, is decided. The fact that bilateral donors jump on to the band-wagon of the "Bank" and IMF coalition is hardly to the benefit of the Africans, apart from its elite.

With direct colonialism nothing but a historical fact any more, imperialism has been able to establish new forms of domination, of which debt is the prime tool. Is that why we are not showing our human face, that is so often claimed by the Nordic donors, by writing off all debts? One aspect very often pushed under the carpet is, that it is very hard to get a moral justification for the claim that Africa is the debtor to us in Europe after centuries of the most ruthless exploitation.

It is not conceivable for us in the North any more to believe that we can remain in our position of economic and political dominance in relation to the poor people and at the same time claim to have a positive attitude towards their potential development. Either we renounce our privileges or we admit to our lack of a philanthropical commitment. It is very unethical to try to have it both ways.

A rather puzzling realization is that when students of development in the industrialized world are getting convinced about their own role in the African under-development they are often filled with despair. Somehow it would be more rational if this insight gave some hope, as they are now able to have a direct influence on the future destinies. Or are they guided by some kind of vested interests even without being aware of this themselves.

Against this global background it seems obvious why various experiments to promote national self-reliance have been to no avail. As claimed by Frank the Third World "*cannot escape dependence*" (Frank 1991:25). However, left to fend for themselves it might have been a rather suitable development ideology to get a new start after the colonial era.

It has been argued by Wisner (1988:45-52) that these kinds of policy approaches have not been a failure in themselves. Rather they have never been given a fair chance. For development to be meaningful it has to emerge from within the society of the poor. From that perspective there can be no structural boundaries to limit a conscientious political action, as initiated from among the local people themselves.

In his book on rural development Chambers (1983), has hinted to this even in the title; "*putting the last first*". The question still lingering on my mind is who are actually to put them first. According to Friedmann (1992:158-162), it is the task of the civil society to pressurize the state into a more just and legitimate rule. The present systematic disempowerment process has to be reversed by the people themselves.

Community participation cannot be a way to make government and international top down rule look more legitimate. A certain vigilance should be observed in connection to attempts by organisations like the World Bank to co-opt some kind of grassroots support to *develop* the human resource base (Cernea 1988:49-51)

The rural poor are finding themselves in what is termed as a deprivation trap consisting of five integrated components, which are poverty, physical weakness, isolation, vulnerability and powerlessness. For rural development to take place, projects can be initiated and successful, in accordance to the general acceptability

among the local and "other" elites. Physical weakness and isolation are here normally the two faces of under-development, on which a joint local development policy can be agreed upon. On the other hand the risk for confrontation is more obvious if a project was started, with a primary objective to combat powerlessness, vulnerability and poverty (Chambers 1983:108-139)

Poverty, as such, is never addressed seriously in development planning. Instead we are trying to calculate various basic needs requirements or minimum poverty datum lines. However, to counteract poverty, in a more long-term perspective, does not seem to be on the agenda anywhere, except in some loose policy declarations.

Even on a global scale the same kind of considerations can be applied to the centre periphery relations. We in the North are willing to give assistance to counteract bad health and isolation. However, to change the prevailing power structures cannot be in the interest of our own continuous material welfare. If the peripheral countries are made less vulnerable our dominance might be threatened by an independent line of policy.

According to Fanon (1963:73-74), the momentum reached in the mobilization for political liberation should be a launching pad for a struggle against underdevelopment, illiteracy and disease. From this perspective development would be not only an identification of basic needs to be provided for externally, but also a realisation of how to better use internal resources in a productive way.

Subsistence agriculture and informal industrial activities should not only be regarded as a mere survival strategy. On the contrary in a policy for national self-reliance all forms of productive work are necessary ingredients of a mobilization for development.

## 2. AGRICULTURAL POLICIES AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

An agricultural development based on successful small-holder production, on an aggregate level, is often regarded to be part of a development process, especially among economists. However, within the strategy adopted a stratification within the rural population is implicit. With the development for some, a simultaneous marginalisation process is taking place, among the ones not so fortunate. A policy for export (cash crop) production is conflicting to the need for food security. This has been described, with Kenya as an example by Wisner.

*One characteristic of the Kenyan economy shared by all dependent capitalist economies is that it produces marginals. A marginal person or household is one whose mode of production has been seriously disturbed or destroyed by its contact with the capitalist mode of production, yet whose productive energies have not been absorbed by the latter. (Wisner 1976:1)*

Zimbabwe has often been mentioned as an example of a country with one of the best extension services in tropical Africa (Raikes 1988:18). However, also in this case the dichotomy between the goals of export production and food security

is obvious. Put in another way it can be expressed, as a conflict of interest between various categories, within the farming community. Furthermore, this has to be viewed in the international perspective of Zimbabwe as a nation influenced by the needs on the global market for cheap agricultural products.

At independence in 1980 an urgent task for the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture and Rural Settlements was to integrate production among the commercial farms (primarily owned by white farmers) and the peasant (communal) farmers. A shift of emphasis towards the latter ones was expressed;

*Communal areas will be the target of much agricultural investment in the public sector. Government aims to achieve two goals in its investment programme: the alleviation of poverty and the introduction of institutional, production and service arrangements necessary for rural renewal.* (Republic of Zimbabwe 1982:66)

The policy instruments to pursue this consisted of; (i) marketing organisation, (ii) price regulations, (iii) credit, (iv) agricultural inputs, (v) irrigation, (vi) co-operative development, (vii) research, and (viii) extension.

*Some of these measures include provision of credit facilities to small-scale resettlement and communal farmers, annual review of the pricing policy for agricultural produce, promotion of research activities relevant to the sector and development of irrigation schemes. In addition, agricultural production will be further diversified.* (Republic of Zimbabwe 1986:1)

Without any doubt the communal farmers of Zimbabwe have emerged as significant producers of commercial crops. Thereby they have played an important role in the national economic development. On the other hand there are also some grey clouds looming large over the Zimbabwe skies.

*Other kinds of dualism are beginning to emerge among the communal farmers themselves, between farmers operating in different regions with different natural conditions, but also between households of the same area. The difficult situation in the dryland areas has to be tackled seriously, for example, if Zimbabwe is to achieve not only a level of self-sufficiency nationally, but also locally. Here are some of the newest challenges facing authorities responsible for research and extension.* (Närman 1991:26)

The vulnerability among many peasants has been particularly obvious since early on this year (1992), but has also been shown by the Food Security Research Project at the University of Zimbabwe.

Agricultural extension is organised by AGRITEX, which employed a total of 1,662 extension workers in September 1990. These ones are working directly on the local level with the farmers. In all they are to service some 1,000,000 peasant households, as well as resettled and small-scale commercial farmers.

The approach adopted for communal farmers is on some kind of group basis, for example the master farmer scheme. Leaders are selected for a group, and trained as initiators of change in the various communities. However, the expected trickle-down effect of technological benefits are often not taking place, as planned.

*...the technology will almost invariably reach the more innovative sub-audience with the bulk of the other members of the target groups remaining little or not effected at all. (Chipika 1990:23)*

Even if a group approach can be regarded as a rather cost-efficient way to disseminate agricultural knowledge it poses a danger in that the disadvantaged farmers are to a large extent left out, and thereby the gap within the farming community is widened. If the main agricultural policies were giving priority to food security, a considerable attempt to integrate non-adopers would be the prime objective for the extension services. However, this does not seem to be the case at the present time.

Through the extension system research priorities are also to be identified among the farming community and transmitted, to the relevant central and local authorities, by the extension workers. These ones are also holding a responsibility to carry out various on-farm experiments.

In the training of extension workers the emphasis on improving the technological skills, rather than the sociological understanding has increased. If these ones are to reach a wider community with their advice, as well as finding out the needs for technical improvements, of the most disadvantaged peasants institutional and in-service training must adress these requirements. Extension workers have to become better learners, as well as teachers (Johnson 1988:112).

*One might expect that extension workers would decide to follow up the activities of non-adopters and make an effort to comprehend their reasoning. Extension workers, however, are primarily trained in technical matters, and are not trained for competency in field survey activities which demand a deeper socio-economic understanding of the local context. (Närman 1991:94)*

In the final analysis it can be claimed that extension, research, as well as other policy instruments, such as credit, have a tendency to favour farmers, that are a little bit better off than the average. This is hardly a surprising tendency, and it can even be regarded as positive in respect of *national* (and international) interest. However, if we link up this sketch of the Zimbabwean extension approach to the debate on power and conflicting interest, represented by all the various actors, in the developing process the conclusions drawn will be far more dubious.

The easiest way out for the Zimbabwe regime is to continue its present agricultural policy. Continously we are faced with a situation in which it is extremely difficult to actually reach the most disadvantaged members of a community with different kinds of development projects. It is much easier to target the objective to try to make some kind of a positive impact, e.g. further integration in the commercial production, for at least some segments of the rural population.

A situation of status quo, avoiding a direct open conflict, would be achieved by an encouragement of the cash crop production. Peasants would be *assisted* when a state of acute crisis is prevalent. However, if we are to talk of a long term development process the interest of the most disadvantaged within the local community must be listened to. They must be able to mobilize and control their

resources to not only secure the livelihood, but also address other fundamental human needs, as identified internally. As this is a dilemma of confronting interests it is hardly possible to imagine a harmonious solution.

### 3. CONCLUDING REMARK

It has to be realized that development cannot possibly be decided upon by some kind of harmonious consensus. We do not live in a world with a common future, but in a global structure built up on a web of conflicting interests. Emerging confrontations will not be solved by minor adjustments within a given frame, remaining within more or less of a status quo situation. Even if the dependency schools are now dead they have contributed to the understanding of the fact that development and underdevelopment are inherently two components of the same process.

As social scientists we can choose to engage ourselves in a manipulation of realities by presenting only part of the truth, while omitting what is more important. Instead of considering what ought to be we can occupy ourselves with what is. We can give objective theoretical explanations to various aspects of underdevelopment, but at the same time avoiding the conflict-laden processes which are parts of a more holistic picture.

If on the other hand social sciences are to contribute to the resolution of various conflicts concerning a development process we have to rethink our whole perspective. We have to start off by a closer analysis of conflicting interests involved, as the basic causes of the problem we are trying to address. It is not viable any more to persist in merely treating the symptoms of a conflict and smoothen some of the effects. If this will be the continuous social science approach to conflict resolution this in itself will deepen the structures of confrontation and in the long run it will perpetuate the problems into a stage of no return.

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