

Defining Development

Development is simply defined as "good change". Briefly discuss what you understand by good change and how can we use information and communication technologies to achieve it.

- Explain good change – as progress towards a desired state
- Good change lies on a continuum and development is a process not a definite goal post
- Conclude on the fact that development is an encompassing change and has winners and losers
- ICT4D projects should consider the unintended consequences of the projects and not only on the intended objectives

As change is a process, this definition of development tends to denote a process towards a desirable state in society. Whether this state is achieved in the short or long term, change has several implications for society. Disruption may occur in the established patterns of living within the society as it moves towards *good change*, and thus reflect a contradiction to its intended meaning, and generate a discourse on what constitutes this 'good change'. As a result, the term *development* in both academic and non-academic fields has enjoyed an ambiguous position of being alluded to a diversity of meanings defining or evaluating *what* 'good change' is, and *who* this *good change* belongs to.

In addressing these gaps, Amartya Sen's work on capabilities and functionings has been the major influence since the human perspective of development began in the mid-1980s. Sen argued that in defining *good change* what really mattered to both the poor and non-poor person was the "capability to function", and "that poverty cannot be properly measured by income or even by utility as conventionally understood; what matters is not the things a person has – or the feelings these provide – but what a person *is* or can be and does or *can do*. What matters for well-being is not just the characteristics of commodities consumed, as in the utility approach, but what use the consumer can and does make of commodities.

By this argument, Sen urges the development discourse into considering that the concept of achieving *good change* or human well-being goes beyond just providing commodities and their use to considering their functionings; that is, "what a person does with the commodities of given characteristics that they come to possess or control (or can do with them)". The ability to carry out this functioning is defined by the capabilities of the person. Since one may have different abilities - capabilities in Sen's perspective - what characterises development is "the freedom that a person has in terms of the choice of functionings, given his personal features (conversion of characteristics into functionings) and his command over commodities....". Hence, if what really matters in achieving *good change* centres on the "capability to function", then development within this perspective is about "enabling", particularly, "the enlargement of people choices" of functioning in society.

Development in its simplest definition and perhaps in its common usage can be considered as the objective of moving to a state relatively better than what previously existed: “good change” as defined by Chambers (1997). As change is a process, this definition of development tends to denote a process towards a desirable state in society. Whether this state is achieved in the short or long term, change has several implications for society. Disruption may occur in the established patterns of living within the society as it moves towards *good change*, and thus reflect a contradiction to its intended meaning, and generate a discourse on what constitutes this ‘good change’ (Thomas, 2000: 23). As a result, the term *development* in both academic and non-academic fields has enjoyed an ambiguous position of being alluded to a diversity of meanings defining or evaluating *what ‘good change’ is, and who this good change belongs to.* Much of the debate and controversy, as Potter (2002) attests, has focused on how development may be defined and pursued in theory and “real world efforts” which tend to be exhibited in practice. From the 1940s when the multi- and inter-disciplinary field of development studies was established, through the mid-1980s and 1990s to date there has been a proliferation of literature on development theory and practice (Polanyi, 1957; Preston, 1987, 1996; Lesson and Minogue, 1988; Escobar, 1995a, 1995b; Hettne, 1995; Cowen and Shenton, 1996; Potter, 2002).

The discourse is therefore neither just a consequence of current critiques within academic circles nor current development efforts pursued by development-oriented actors such as states of developing and developed countries, international agencies, public institutions, private organizations, non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations and entrepreneurial activities of individuals, but a long and on-going process of promoting and applying changing and varied views of development by these actors and academics (Potter, 2002).

To this effect, development tends to be a space of discourse and activity that embraces several distinct and interrelated conceptualisations and understandings of *good change*. Arguably, the distinct and interrelated conceptualisations within this space of discourse and activity can be oriented around three things; *development theories, development strategies* and *development ideologies* (Hettne, 1995). Development theories refer to the “sets of ostensibly logical propositions, which aim to explain how development has occurred in the past, and/or how it should occur in the future” (Potter, 2002: 61). As logical propositions the theories construct values and perspectives of what *good change* is or what constitutes a desirable state in a developing society.

However, since the values of people in a society are neither identical nor in complete variance (Toye, 1995: 43), and can moreover be redefined through social interaction, a diversity of perspectives exists and more may be formed. These theories, as they have been in history, thus tend to be more normative, seeking not only to analyse their perspective of development, but to also suggest the seeming better way in which it should occur in order to create the *good change* (Hettne, 1995: 12; Thomas, 2000: 42). On the other hand, the “real world efforts” as pursued by development-oriented actors to achieve development in practice are what are considered development strategies. These strategies are aimed at changing the existing economic and social structures and institutions to create the solutions and conditions towards a desirable state in society (Hettne, 1995). They may as well be considered as the approaches adopted by development-oriented actors to achieve development. Furthermore, the development theories and strategies define different goals and objectives that reflect the

diverse influences of development including social, economic, political, cultural, ethical, and ecological, and religious. The goals depicted by a development agenda – theoretical, practical or both – constitute the development ideologies defining the dimensions of the development process (Hettne, 1995). For example, early theories and strategies of development were more focused on achieving economic growth as compared to latter theories and strategies that emphasize social, political, ecological and other dimensions of development (Potter, 2002). The theories, strategies and ideologies tend to sum up the themes or paradigms of discourses in development. Thus, in determining how development should occur and how technology can help achieve that in a developing country, one has to first evaluate these varied extant themes; theories, strategies and ideologies. By such an evaluation, an understanding of what *good change* is and whom this *good change* belongs to would be obtained, and further on, how technology can contribute or help to achieve this *good change* would be determined.

The prevalent competing theories or ‘views’ within the discourses of development have been: modernization, structuralism (Marxism and dependency), neoliberalism, human centred-development, and post-development (Potter et al., 1999; Thomas, 2000; Hettne, 2002; Sidaway, 2002). As mentioned earlier, these theories have more often than not been normatively and analytically argued to define what development should be in the less developed parts of the world.

Modernization Theory

Modernization characterised the social, economic and political systems of Western Europe and North America that had developed between the 17th and 19th century and spread to other European countries, South America, Asian and African continents through the 19th and 20th century (Eisenstadt, 1966: 1). It became a dominant proposition of development in the 1950s and 1960s, pointing out the differences between the developed or rich nations and the less developed or poor nations of the world. Academic proponents of the theory promoted it by examining the socio-economic conditions of becoming a ‘modern’ society. The terms ‘less developed’, ‘underdeveloped’, and ‘developing’ countries, also synonymous to ‘Third World’, implied that some appreciable “degree of economic and social backwardness” existed in these countries (Toye, 1995: 43). The root cause of this underdevelopment was the focus on traditional modes of production, and the lack of skills, know-how, and poor tradition of research and exploitation of technology (Soeftestad and Sein, 2003: 64). The poor countries were characterised as being ‘traditional’ or having ‘primitive’ values, comprising of an orientation to the past, strong kin relationships, superstition, and fatalism (Webster, 1900: 49-50).

Developed countries, in contrast, managed to move from this ‘traditional society’ through industrial revolutions coupled with research and exploitation of technology that resulted in an increase in the productive capacities of their societies and creating the conditions of modernity (Soeftestad and Sein, 2003). The ‘modern’ society was characterised by innovation, motivation, entrepreneurship, weaker kin relationships and not enslaved by tradition (Webster, 1900: 49-50). The social, economic and political systems of the developed countries therefore signified the vision, epitome or desirable state of society that the less developed countries should seek to become or follow, and the process of change to achieve that formed the basic notion of modernization (Eisenstadt, 1996: 1).

Consequently, the developed countries defined what constituted *good change* and how it was to be achieved – through imitating the development strategies and ideologies applied in developed countries into less developed countries in order to bridge the gap of differences or to become “developed” like them (Hettne, 2002). Imitation meant that the history of development through industrialisation that had occurred in Western Europe and North America became a ‘blueprint’ for development for the developing world (Webster, 1990: 53). In this perspective the major ideology was to promote economic development – raising the productive capacities of societies – through industrialisation (Bernstein, 1971). Modernization theorists argued that industrialisation would take-off when the obstacles of economic growth were removed. This required the creation of capital, through sustained capital accumulation and investment, and a capitalist class, as in the entrepreneurial ambition that could catalyse industrialisation and further on, modernization (Webster, 1990; Binns, 2002). It thus was

expected that the traditional patterns of living; norms, actions and values would give way as the ideas and technologies of the rich countries diffused through the poor countries.

As modernization became more popular within academic circles, its influence extended into several development policies and strategies carried out by development agencies, particularly from the United States and United Nations, for almost a period of twenty years. The decline of colonial empires created the space for politicians to keenly show newly independent countries and other Third World countries that 'following them' was viable path to sustained development (Webster, 1990: 49). A form of trusteeship was formed between rich and poor countries, with modernization reflecting in practice in the form of capital investments and knowledge transfer to aid the commercialisation of agriculture, education, establishment of technical cultures in knowledge, skills and capacities to develop technology, and the establishment of political systems of liberal democracy.

By the late 1960s and 1970s, however, criticisms against the notions and propositions of modernization began to surface. From the theoretical perspective, critics argued that the terms – 'traditional' and 'modern' – are vague descriptors of two very distinct societies, serving as 'labels' and failing to recognise and understand the different socio-economic and political systems which existed in the societies they labelled and social processes of change they undergo (Webster, 1990: 56). The argument that development depends on the displacement of values, beliefs and actions of the traditional societies by that of modern societies contributes to the failure of understanding the different value systems of these societies, and furthermore, narrow view of what *good change* is. For example, evidence in history pointed out that certain norms and values in the traditional religion of Islam have been reinforced by the diffusion of modern technology introduced from modern societies in the West (Gusfield, 1973). Technological advancements in transport have made the pilgrimage to Mecca a viable proposition to many Muslims (Mair, 1984: 25), and furthermore, motivated them into "activities associated with capital investment and economic growth" in order to meet the costs of the journey (Webster, 1990: 57). In effect, economic growth did not necessarily require the displacement or abandonment of the traditional patterns of living, norms, actions and values within these developing societies.

Another example comes from Mexico, where Ortiz (1970) evaluated the impact of a development scheme carried out by the Mexican government in village of Tzintzuntzan where pottery was a major economic activity. Previous attempts by the government to help potters develop higher quality pottery for a wider market had failed, even though it included the installation of more sophisticated kilns. On the other hand, there was a dramatic increase in the production and sales of pottery, which Ortiz argued resulted from the increase in demand for domestic cooking pots in the local urban market and the construction of a better road enabling an easier transportation of the pottery to the town. For these small business enterprises, the new economic opportunities relied on traditional social ties including kinship and friends as the engine of commercial growth, and improved transportation infrastructure could thus be harnessed to enhance these relationships (Webster, 1990: 60). It presupposes that not all values, norms and actions of traditional societies may need to be displaced, once the development agenda can offer viable opportunities relative to the pertinent needs of these societies (as defined by them), the willingness to increase their productive capacities was created (Long, 1977: 50).

Some aspects of the traditional patterns of living can serve as critical resources to create an understanding of socio-economic and material needs of these societies, and furthermore, help facilitate and strategise the development agenda to be implemented. This places much emphasis on the need to study and understand the socio-economic and political structures of developing countries, their value systems and social processes that influence change within them. By doing so a wider perspective of *good change* in which the perspectives of developing countries are of principal consideration would be created.

Criticisms such as the above, stirred new propositions in development discourse that included structuralism and dependency theory.

Human-centred Development

The World Bank stated in its 1991 *World Development Report* that, "The challenge of development... is to improve the quality of life. Especially in the world's poor countries, a better quality of life generally calls for higher incomes – but it involves much more. It encompasses as ends in themselves better education, higher standards of health and nutrition, less poverty, a cleaner environment, more equality of opportunity, greater individual freedom, and a richer culture life" (World Bank, 1991: 4).

This move towards human or people centred development became widely accepted with several interrelated theories and strategies of development. Popular propositions sharing this perspective include "another development", sustainable development, human development (from Sen's capabilities approach) and alternative development, while strategies and policies include the "bottom-up" and participatory approach (Potter et al., 1999: 67; Thomas, 2000: 32-34). "Another development" was first developed in the mid-1970s at the Seventh Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly and a publication by the Dag Hammarskjold Foundation '*What Now*' (Hettne, 1995 and Brohman, 1996 in Potter et al., 1999: 67).

The major focus of the concept was the fact that development needed to be conceived as a self-reliance process in which the drivers towards *good change* are internal. This among other things involved the meeting of basic needs of people, becoming ecologically sensitive and promoting public participation (Nerfin, 1977; Potter, 1985). From these, criticisms began to grow against most seeming top-down approaches, especially economic growth-oriented ones that had been dominating the development agenda in the world. What most of these top-down approaches had managed to do was to create economic growth and paths to modernity with increasing poverty, inequity, and disease (Hettne, 1995).

The awareness created by critics inspired several strands of seeming bottom-up approaches which emphasized the need for Third World countries to become self-reliant, and make development much more closely related to their specific "sociocultural, historical, and institutional conditions" (Stohr, 1981 in Potter et al., 1999: 69). Some of the strategies in practice were to diversify their economies and introduce non-agricultural activities, and involve those who had been less considered or left out by previous development strategies and ideologies. Additionally, ecological sensitivity became a growing concern in development. The debate became the focus of agencies such as the Brundtland Commission on Environmental and Development (WCED, 1987), and the United Nations, which made it a political issue at their conference on Environmental and Development, dubbed the Earth Summit, in 1992.

Subsequently, this ecologically-sensitive development became known as sustainable development, with the objective of development "that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987: 43). By defining this focus, sustainable development managed to address the ecological dimension of human-centred development which had become the central focus of development thinking as a combination of theories, strategies and ideologies. One dimension had been addressed but other concerns like poverty and inequity remained unsolved. Development had to be considered beyond the ecological dimension, but as a multidimensional process "involving major changes in social structures, popular attitudes, and national institutions, as well as acceleration of economic growth, reduction of inequality, and the reduction of poverty" (Todaro and Smith, 2003: 17).

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cannot be properly measured by income or even by utility as conventionally understood; what matters is not the things a person has – or the feelings these provide – but what a person *is* or can be and does or *can do*. What matters for well-being is not just the characteristics of commodities consumed, as in the utility approach, but what use the consumer can and does make of commodities” (Todaro and Smith, 2003: 17-18).

By this argument, Sen urges the development discourse into considering that the concept of achieving *good change* or human well-being goes beyond just providing commodities and their use to considering their functionings; that is, “what a person does with the commodities of given characteristics that they come to possess or control (or can do with them)” (Todaro and Smith, 2003: 18). The ability to carry out this functioning is defined by the capabilities of the person. Since one may have different abilities - capabilities in Sen’s perspective - what characterises development is “the freedom that a person has in terms of the choice of functionings, given his personal features (conversion of characteristics into functionings) and his command over commodities....” (Sen, 1985: 10-11). Hence, if what really matters in achieving *good change* centres on the “capability to function”, then development within this perspective is about “enabling”, particularly, “the enlargement of people choices” of functioning in society (Nederveen Pieterse, 2001: 6).

Though capabilities may be partly determined by income, income can neither address all of the social constraints that hamper certain human choices nor even necessary to the fulfilment of some of them. The choices essential to the enlargement of capabilities are: “the choice of healthy life, the choice to be educated, and the choice to decent standard of living” (Soeftestad and Sein, 2003: 68). These notions from Amartya Sen’s work have had a major influence on the development agenda, particularly serving as the underpinning notions of human development and reforming the development agenda of the strategies of the United Nations. The United Nations’ 1994 *Human Development Report*, in defining development, stated in reference to Sen that,

“Human beings are born with certain potential capabilities. The purpose of development is to create an environment in which all people can expand their capabilities, and opportunities can be enlarged for both present and future generations” (UNDP, 1994: 13).

The UNDP further embodied the key choices of functionings into the statistical measures of human development in their reports such as UNDP (2001). The key indices as outlined by Soeftestad and Sein (2003: 68) consist of –

- a) Human Development Index; life expectancy at birth, level of education and Gross National Product (GNP) per capita (representing the three choices mentioned above),
- b) Gender Development Index (GDI): uses the same factors as the HDI, but looks at the differences between men and women,
- c) Gender Equity Measure (GEM): looks at the possibilities for women to be part of the decision-making in economics and politics,
- d) Human Poverty Index (HPI): HPI-1 for developing countries, and HPI-2 for industrialised countries.

Academics, development agencies and practitioners have since extensively used HDI to formulate strategies and policies in several development projects as it provides the important indices for measuring socio-economic development. The indices emphasize non-economic factors over economic factors, making them better indicators of countries' efforts in tackling the impacts of poverty (Soeftestad and Sein, 2003: 68).

On the other hand, HDI has also come under criticism of having a narrow perspective on what constitutes people's choices. It is argued that HDI fails to "include essential but largely subjective measures such as political freedom, human rights, and citizen participation in democratic activities" (Soeftestad and Sein, 2003: 69). The measures that HDI fails to recognise are what are emphasized by another proposition of development known as 'Alternative Development' (Nederveen Pieterse, 2001). Alternative development is a people-centred and participatory approach towards development that seeks to emphasize notions including civil society involvement, culture and context, and decentralisation (Soeftestad and Sein, 2003: 69). These notions of alternative development make it synonymous to another development, discussed above. Alternative development, another development and people-centred development form a stream of development, which are not state dependent but seek to build development from the people. The combination of human development and alternative development does create a form of development with a wider perspective of people's choices. However, is this the best form of development? Is it a favourable answer to the challenges of developing countries, and if it is, what can technology offer to make it a reality? These are the questions that still remain.