

Chapter 10

Development

Overview

In this chapter, we will start with the common understanding of development and the problems presented by this understanding. In the later sections' we will explore the ways in which these problems can be addressed and discuss some alternative ways of thinking about development. After going through this chapter you should be able to

- explain the meaning of the term development.
- discuss the achievements and problems of existing models of development.
- discuss some of the alternative models of development which have been put forward.

10.1 Introduction

Suppose in a school each class brings out an annual class magazine as one of their extra-curricular activities. In one class, the teacher takes the last year's magazine as a model, makes a plan of what this year's magazine should contain in terms of topics, articles, poetry, etc. and then divides and assigns topics to different students. It is possible that as a result a student interested in cricket may find that she has been allotted a different topic and the one who has been allotted cricket is actually keen to write a play. It is also possible that in this scheme three students may want to get together to work out a series of cartoons but find that they have been placed in different groups. In another class, however, the content of the magazine is debated by the students. There are many disagreements but eventually a plan for a magazine emerges about which all are in agreement.

In your opinion, which class will come up with a magazine in which the students get to realise their particular interests in the best possible manner? The first may produce a good-looking magazine but will the content be engrossing? Will the person who wants to write on cricket, write with equal passion on her assigned topic? Which magazine will be seen as unique and which as standard? Which class will feel that working on the magazine was interesting and which class will do it as just routine homework?

For a society, deciding about what constitutes development is a bit like students deciding about what kind of school magazine they want and how they should work on it. We could mechanically follow a model which has been previously used in our own, or other countries, or we could plan keeping in mind the good of the society as a whole as well as the rights of those people whose lives may be directly affected by development projects. The leaders can either concentrate on implementing plans regardless of protests or they can proceed democratically, carrying the people with them.

In the broadest sense of the term, development conveys the ideas of improvement, progress, well-being and an aspiration for a better life. Through its notion of development a society articulates what constitutes its vision for the society as a whole and how best to achieve

it. However, the term development is also often used in a narrower sense to refer to more limited goals such as increasing the rate of economic growth, or modernising the society. Development has unfortunately often come to be identified with achieving pre-set targets, or completing projects like dams, or factories, hospitals, rather than with realising the broader vision of development which the society upholds. In the process some sections of society may have benefited while others may have had to suffer loss of their homes, or lands, or way of life, without any compensatory gains.

Issues such as whether the rights of people have been respected in the course of development, whether the benefits and burdens of development have been justly distributed, or whether decisions regarding development priorities have been democratically made, have been raised in many countries. Hence, development has become the subject of considerable controversy today. The models of development which have been adopted in different countries have become the subject of debate and criticism and alternative models have been put forward. In such a situation the broader understanding of development can serve as a standard by which the development experience of a country is examined.

10.2 The Challenge of Development

The concept of development gained importance after the second half of the twentieth century. This was the time when a large number of countries in Asia and Africa gained political independence. Most were impoverished and their populations had a low standard of living. Education, health and other facilities were poor. They were often described as 'underdeveloped' or 'developing'. The comparison was with the richer countries in Western Europe and the United States.

In the 1950s and 1960s when most countries of Asia and Africa had achieved independence from colonial rule, the most urgent task in front of them was to solve the pressing problems of poverty, malnourishment, unemployment, illiteracy and the lack of basic amenities that a majority of their populations faced. They argued that the reason why they were backward was because under colonial rule their resources had been used not for their own benefit but for

the benefit of their colonial masters. With Independence, they could reorganise their resources in the best possible manner to serve their national interests. Therefore it was now possible for them to formulate such policies which would allow them to overcome their backwardness and move towards achieving the standards of their former colonial masters. This provided the impetus for these countries to undertake development projects.

R. K. Laxman in the Times of India



If this project comes up we will be finished!

The concept of development has undergone many changes over the years. In the initial years the focus was on catching up with the west in terms of economic growth and modernisation of societies. Developing countries adopted goals like faster economic growth through industrialisation, modernisation of agriculture and extending and modernising education. It was believed at the time that the state was the only agency capable of initiating this kind of social and economic change. Many countries embarked upon ambitious projects of development, often with the help of loans and aid from the developed countries.

In India a series of Five Year Plans for development were made starting from the 1950s, and these included a number of mega projects such as the Bhakra Nangal Dam, setting up steel plants in different parts of the country, mining, fertilizer production and improving agricultural techniques. It was hoped that a multi-pronged strategy would have an impact on the economy and significantly increase the wealth of the country. It was also hoped that the emerging prosperity would gradually 'trickle down' to the poorest sections of society and help to reduce inequality. A great deal of faith was placed in adopting the latest discoveries of science and state of the art technologies. New educational institutions like the Indian Institutes of Technology were set up and collaboration

with advanced countries in order to have access to their knowledge became a top priority. It was believed that the process of development would make the society more modern and forward looking and set it on the path of growth.

However, the model of development adopted by India and other countries has come under a great deal of criticism over the years and this has led to some rethinking about the goals and processes of development today.

10.3 Criticisms of Development Models

Critics of development have pointed out that the kind of development models which have been adopted in many countries has proved very costly for the developing countries. The financial costs have been enormous, putting many countries into long-term debt. Africa is still suffering from the enormous debts which it ran up by borrowings from the richer countries. The gains in terms of growth have not been commensurate and poverty and disease continue to plague the continent.

The Social Costs of Development

This model of development has also had high social costs. A large number of people have been displaced from their homes and localities due to the construction of big dams, industrial activities and mining activities, or other projects. Displacement results in loss of livelihood and increases impoverishment. If rural agricultural communities are displaced from their traditional occupations and regions they end up at the margins of society, swelling the large number of urban and rural poor. Traditional skills acquired over an extended period may be lost. There is also a loss of culture because when people are relocated they lose a whole way of community life. Such displacement has led to struggles in many countries.

Displaced people have not always accepted their fate passively. You may have heard about the 'Narmada Bachao Andolan' which

Let's Do It

Is any major developmental project (e.g. building of dam, road, rail or industry etc.) taking place in your area? Has there been any protest or complaint against that project? What issues have been raised by the protesters? What is the response of the government to these issues? Meet some protesters and government officials to find out their versions.

has been leading a movement against the Sardar Sarovar Dam on the river Narmada for many years. The supporters of this big dam claim that it will generate electricity, help irrigate large areas of land and also provide drinking water to the desert areas of Kutch and Saurashtra. The opponents of the dam dispute these claims. They claim that almost one million people have been displaced. They have lost their lands through submergence, or construction, and consequently lost their livelihood. Most of these people belong to the tribal and *dalit* communities who constitute some of the most under-privileged groups in the country. Some even argue that the dam would greatly upset the ecological balance submerging large tracts of forests.

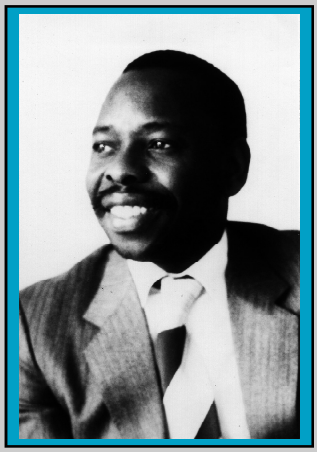
Environmental Costs of Development

Development has indeed caused a high degree of environmental degradation in many countries and not just the displaced people but all of the population is beginning to feel the consequences. When the 'tsunami' hit the South and South-East Asian coasts in 2004, it was observed that the destruction of mangroves and the building of commercial enterprises along the shore line was the reason for the greater extent of the damage caused. You must have read about global warming. The ice in the Arctic and Antarctic is melting because of increased emission of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere and this has the potential to cause floods and actually submerge low lying areas like Bangladesh and the Maldives.

In the long term, the ecological crisis will adversely affect all of us. Air pollution is already a problem which does not discriminate between the rich and the poor. But in the short term, indiscriminate use of resources tends to adversely affect the under-privileged more sharply. Loss of forests affects the poor who use forest resources for a variety of subsistence needs like firewood, medicinal herbs or food. Drying up of rivers and ponds and falling ground water levels means that women have to walk longer in order to procure water.

The model of development we are pursuing is heavily dependent on the increasing use of energy. Most of the energy currently generated in the world is from non-renewable sources like coal or petroleum. Large tracts of the Amazon rainforests are being

Ken Saro-Wiwa



Just imagine that a hidden treasure is found in your backyard. How will you feel if the treasure is taken away little by little by authorities in the name of development? This development is not reflected in your standard of living or even in facilities for the colony you stay in. Further, your house as a site for the treasure is constantly vandalised by people who claim to use the treasure for development. Isn't it gross injustice for the people in whose house the treasure has been unearthed?

Oil had been found in the region of Ogoni in Nigeria in the 1950s which resulted in crude oil exploration. Soon economic growth and big business created around it an entangled web of political intrigues, environmental problems and corruption. This prevented development of the very region where oil had been found.

Ken Saro-Wiwa, an Ogoni by birth, was recognised as an author, journalist and television producer in the 1980s. In his work, he observed and reacted to the exploitation around him as the oil and gas industry took riches from beneath the feet of the poor Ogoni farmers, and in return left the land polluted and the people disenfranchised.

Saro-Wiwa led a non-violent struggle with the launch of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) in 1990 — an open, grassroots community-based political movement. The movement was so effective that by 1993 the oil companies had to pull out of Ogoni. But Saro-Wiwa paid the price for this. The military rulers of Nigeria framed him in a murder case and the military tribunal sentenced him to death. Saro-Wiwa said that the military rulers were doing this at the behest of Shell, the multi-national oil company that had to withdraw from the Ogoni region. Human rights organisations all over the world protested against this trial and appealed for his release. Ignoring this worldwide protest, the Nigerian rulers executed Ken Saro-Wiwa in 1995.

Environmentalism

You must have often heard terms like pollution, waste management, sustainable development, protection of endangered species and global warming. These are the buzz words of the environmental movement which works to protect natural resources and eco-systems. Environmentalists maintain that human beings should learn to live in harmony with the rhythms of the eco-system and not manipulate the natural environment to serve their immediate interests. They believe that mankind is using up and destroying natural resources to such an extent that we will bequeath only a barren earth, poisoned rivers and polluted air to future generations.

The roots of environmentalism can be traced back to the nineteenth-century revolt against industrialisation. Today, the environmental movement has become a worldwide phenomenon with thousands of non-governmental groups and even some 'green' political parties. Some well-known environmental groups include Green Peace and the World Wildlife Fund and in India we have the Chipko Movement which emerged to protect the Himalayan forests. Such groups try to pressurise governments to modify their industrial and developmental policies in the light of environmental goals.

deforested in order to provide for the increased consumer needs. Are there enough of these non-renewable resources which can allow not only the advanced countries but all people in the world to enjoy an affluent life style? Given the finite nature of these resources, the answer would be no. What about the future generations? Are we going to hand over a depleted earth and multiple problems to them?

Assessing Development

It could not of course be said that development has had only negative effects for the world. Some countries have had some success in increasing their rate of economic growth and even in reducing poverty. But overall, inequalities have not been seriously reduced and poverty continues to be a problem in the developing world. As we saw earlier, it was assumed that the benefits of growth would trickle down to the poorest and under-privileged sections of the society and thereby raise the standards of living of all. However, the world over, the gap between the rich and the poor has been widening. A country may have high rates of growth but that doesn't necessarily translate into a fair distribution of its benefits. When economic growth and redistribution do not go together, the benefits are likely to be cornered by those who are already privileged.

Development

It is now increasingly being recognised that there is a need to adopt a broader notion of development. An excessive focus on economic growth has not only given rise to a wide range of problems but even economic growth has not always been satisfactory. Hence, development is now being viewed in broader terms as a process which should improve the quality of life of all the people.

If development is understood as a process which aims to improve the quality of life of people, it could be argued that measuring the rate of economic growth alone would be an inadequate and at times misleading indicator of development. There is now a search for alternative ways of measuring development. One such attempt is the Human Development Report which is annually brought out by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). This report ranks countries on the basis of their performance in social indicators like literacy and education levels, life expectancy and maternal mortality rates. This measure is called the Human Development Index. According to this conception development should be a process which allows more and more people to make meaningful choices and the pre-condition for this is the fulfilment of basic needs like food, education, health and shelter. This is called the basic needs approach. Popular slogans like '*roti, kapda aur makaan', 'garibi hatao'* or '*bijli, sadak, pani'* convey the sentiment that without the fulfilment of basic needs, it is impossible for an individual to live a dignified life and pursue her desires. Freedom from want or deprivation is the key to effectively exercising one's choices and pursuing one's desires. In this view, if people die of starvation or cold due to lack of food and shelter, or if children are working instead of being in school, this is indicative of a state of under-development.



Let's Think

Gather information (news reports, articles,charts, tables) about the Human Development Index from the latest Human Development Report available to you. Form different groups in the class and have each group make a presentation on the following:

- India's changing HDI rank.
- India's rank compared to its neighbours.
- Different components of the HDI and India's score on each.
- Compare HDI data for India with figures for economic growth of the country.

10.4 Alternative Conceptions of Development

In the preceding sections we discussed some of the limitations of the model of development pursued so far. There have been huge costs — both human and environmental — of development policies and the costs and benefits of development have been unequally distributed among people. Further, the strategies of development adopted in most countries have been 'top-down', that is, the selection of development priorities and strategies and the actual implementation of projects were all generally decided by the higher levels of the political leadership and bureaucracy. There was often little consultation with the people whose lives would be most immediately affected by development projects. Neither was their experience and the knowledge acquired over centuries utilized nor were their interests taken into account. This was as true of democratic countries as of dictatorial ones. Development thus became a process designed and implemented by the ruling sections in the country who have also often been the major beneficiaries of development projects. This has underscored the need to think of alternative ways of understanding and pursuing development which are equitable and sustainable. Issues of rights, equality, freedom, justice and democracy have all been raised in the process. In this section, we shall examine how these concepts have taken on newer meanings in the context of the development debate.

Let's Do It

Make a list of the kind of things that we regularly discard. Think about how we could recycle or reuse them to reduce the amount of harmful waste.

Right Claims

We have noted how the benefits of development have been largely cornered by the powerful and the costs of the development model have been borne by the poorest and vulnerable sections of the population whether due to ecological degradation or due to displacement and loss of livelihood. One of the issues which has been raised is regarding the protections that affected people can claim from the State and the society as a whole. In a democracy do people have a right be consulted in decisions which directly affect their lives? Do they have a right to livelihood which they can claim when an

activity sanctioned by the government threatens their source of livelihood? Another issue is regarding rights to natural resources. Can communities claim traditional rights to the use of natural resources? This particularly applies to tribal and aboriginal communities who have a specific way of community life and relationship to the environment.

The crucial issue here is to whom do natural resources belong? Is it the local community, the state concerned, or are they a common resource of all humanity? If we understand resources as common to humanity, then humanity would include future generations as well. Negotiating the competing demands of different sections of a population as well as achieving a balance between the claims of the present and future is the task of democracies.

Let's Debate

The rivers belong to the people and not to the government; therefore, any decision about river water should not be taken without people's approval.

Democratic Participation

How many times have you been told that you must do something— say, obey your parents or teachers — for your own good? And have you felt like saying, if it is good for me, please let me decide that myself? The distinction between democracy and dictatorship is that in a democracy conflicts over resources, or different visions of the good life, are resolved through debate and a respect for the rights of all and these cannot be imposed from above. Thus, if everyone in a society has a common stake in achieving a better life, then everyone needs to be involved in formulating the plans of development and in devising ways of implementing them. There is a difference between following a plan made by others and sharing in the formulation of the plans. Firstly, even if others make plans with the best intentions, they are likely to be less aware than you about your specific needs. Secondly, being an active part of the decision-making process is empowering.

Both democracy and development are concerned with realising the common good. By what process can the common good be defined? In democratic countries, the right of people to participate in decision-making is emphasised. One of the ways which has been

Let's Think



These pictures are of satyagraha in the village of Domkhedi in the Narmada Valley. As a result of the construction of the Sardar Sarovar dam, the waters of the Narmada flooded the valley. The 'Narmada Bachao Andolan' protestors chose to face the rising waters. When the waters rose dangerously up to the shoulders of the activists, the government arrested them. Find out more about this controversy and discuss the merits and demerits of big dams. Is the 'Sardar Sarovar Dam' a good way to solve the problem of water shortage? Were the activists justified in offering resistance to this government scheme?





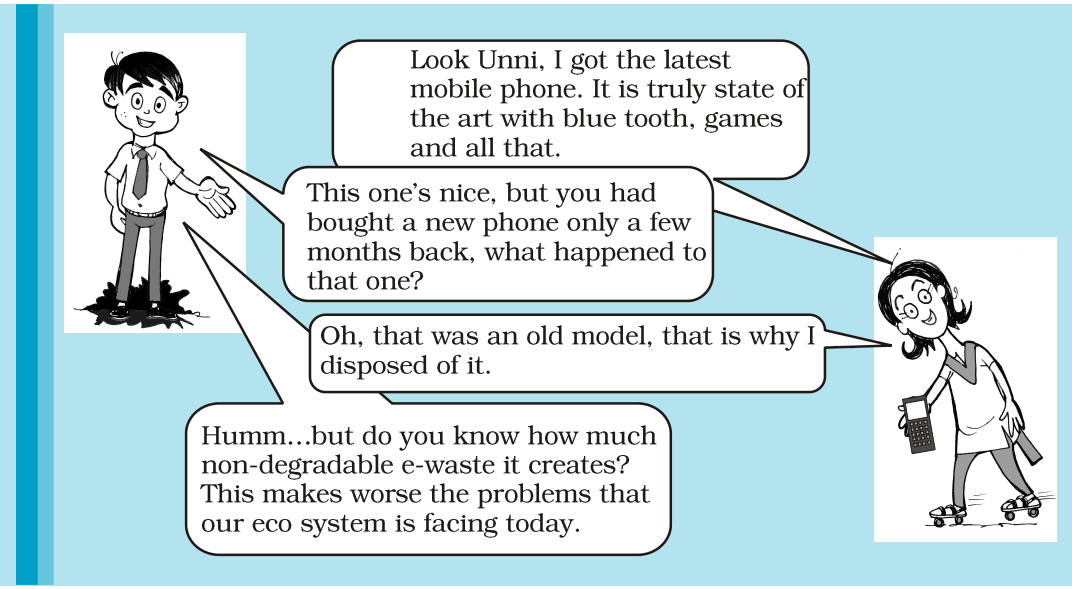


Pictures Credit: Harikrishna and Deepa Jani from www.narmada.org

suggested to ensure participation is to allow local decision-making bodies to take decisions about development projects in the local area. Increasing the powers and resources of local bodies is thus being advocated. On the one hand it is argued that people have to be consulted on issues which most affect them and it should be possible to reject projects which can adversely affect the community. On the other it is said that, involvement in planning and formulating policies allows people to direct resources towards their needs. Where a road must be laid, what should be the route of the metro or local buses, where a park or school should be located, whether a village needs a check dam or an internet café should be decisions which must be taken by them.

It was argued above that the prevailing model of development is "top-down" and tends to view people as objects of development. It

assumes that there is one best way to arrive at solutions for our problems. In the process the accumulated knowledge and experiences of people may be ignored. A decentralised approach to development makes it possible to use various kinds of technologies — traditional and modern — in a creative manner.



Development and Life Style

An alternative model of development would also try to move away from the high cost, ecologically wasteful, technology driven notion of development. Development should not be measured only by the number of cell phones in the country, or by the sophisticated weapons which are developed, or by the size of the cars which people drive, but by the quality of life enjoyed by people in terms of happiness and harmony and satisfaction of essential needs. At one level, efforts should be made to conserve natural resources and use renewable sources of energy as far as is possible. Efforts such as rain-water harvesting, solar and bio-gas plants, micro-hydel projects, compost pits to generate manure out of organic waste are examples in this direction. Such activities have to take place at a local level and therefore demand higher involvement from people. Big projects are

not the only way to effect big improvement. Opponents of big dams have advocated a series of small dams and bunds which require much less investment, cause minimal displacement and can be beneficial to the local population.

At another level, there is also a need to scale down our need for non-renewable resources by changing life styles. This is a tricky issue because it may appear as if people are being asked to accept a lower standard of living and this could also be seen as a curtailment of their freedom to choose. But debating the possibility of alternative life styles could also mean increasing avenues for freedom and creativity by opening up alternative visions of the good life. However, any such policy would call for a high degree of co-operation between governments and people across countries. This would mean adopting democratic methods of decision-making on such matters. But if we understand development as a process of enhancing one's freedoms, and think of people not as passive consumers but as active participants in deciding development goals, it should be possible to reach agreement on such issues. In the process, our notions of rights, freedom and justice would be extended.

Conclusion

The idea of development refers to the desire for a better life. This is a very powerful desire and the hope of improvement is a driving force of human action. In this chapter we have seen how widely accepted versions of what constitutes improvement have come under critical scrutiny. There is a multi-pronged search for a more equitable, sustainable and democratic model of development. In the process, a number of concepts of political theory such as equality, democracy and rights, have been reinterpreted.

The issues that have arisen while pursuing the goal of development reveal that the choices we make have an impact upon others — other human beings and other species in the world. We must therefore see ourselves as part of the larger universe for our fates are linked together. Besides, my actions not only affect others, they also have an impact upon my own future possibilities. We need therefore to choose carefully, keeping in mind not just our present needs but also our long-term interests.

Exercises

1. What do you understand by the term development? Would all sections of society benefit from such a definition of development?

2. Discuss some of the social and ecological costs of the kind of development which has been pursued in most countries.

3. What are some of the new claims for rights which the process of development has generated?

4. What would be the advantages of democracy over other forms of government for ensuring that decisions regarding development are made to promote the common good?

5. In your view, how successful have popular struggles been in making the state responsive to the social and environmental costs of development? Discuss with examples.

Credit: Image on opening page: http://sardarsarovardam.org (SARDAR SAROVAR NARMADA NIGAM LTD).

Development

Notes