

Review

Changes and continuity in the conceptualization of development: A review

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Development has been among the most contested terminologies in the field of politics, sociology and economics over the last two to three centuries. Development is a concept with diverse view across the world and among different scholars, mainly because of its widely changing conceptualization and lack of unified and internationally accepted standards used to measure development across countries and organizations. From the early 18th to the middle of the 20th centuries, conceptualization of development was in line with the colonial objective of the north during which development was believed to be a social shift that dictate the people of the south to abandon their ancestral culture, norms and values to accept the Eurocentric one to gain the status of developed or developing. In the middle of 20th century, the concept was further sophisticated by the emergence of development theory which put a ladder for every country to climb to reach the level of development required by the European power. This paper attempts to outshine the changing and widening conceptualization of development concepts over the centuries, particularly paying close attention to social and cultural aspects of development. And how these changes affected the economic and social recovery of African society after the continent secured the political liberation in the second half of the 20th century. In addition, this article indicated that development has lost its traditional Eurocentric conceptualisation over the last three centuries, and more focused on the need of the people receiving development goal.

Key words: Development, change and continuity, social, cultural, Africa.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, it is normal to hear divergent views from politicians, media and religious leaders about developments that are taking place in different parts of the world. Some of them are in favor of this development, whereas other groups are strongly against it as a result; the term development is a widely used term in the current global discourses. However, when we look at the use of the term over the last three centuries, particularly with regard

to its social and cultural aspects, it is easy to discern change and continuity in its conceptualisation.

This paper discusses three major points: firstly, it presents historical and current conceptualization of development with particular references to social and cultural aspects, secondly, how these change and continuities affected development issues in Africa. And thirdly, to show the major shifts that have been taking

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place since the second half of 20th century, making the culture of the people receiving the development work the crucial issues in the success of development goals.

Defining development

There are many scholars, international government and non-governmental organizations defining development with varying degree of differences to fit into their policy and strategic objectives (Polanyi, 1957; Seers, 1969, Ganesh, 1994, Preston, 1996; Escobar, 1995; Hettne, 1995; Potter, 2002 as cited in Boateng et al. (2008: 2). The work of these scholars and organizations indicated that development is a broad term encompassing diverse issues with varying degree of emphasis leaving the term development devoid of a single internationally accepted definition. Leaving this difficulty aside, it is possible to have a look at some of influential definitions given by highly praised scholars in the field of development discourses. Seer (1969:7) argue that development should be seen not narrowly from the aggregate increase in income and modernization and industrialization of a country as used to be believed traditionally, but rather from the perspective of “reducing poverty, inequalities and unemployment”. According to Seers, the growth of per capita income, when these three central problems of society remain unchanged or go worse than before, it cannot lead to development. He advised international communities that increase in real Growth Domestic Product (GDP) may not lead to development and it can take place without affecting the staggering difference among the society or without affecting the central problem of the society like poverty, unemployment and inequalities.

Indian Institute of Mass Communication also defined development as “removal of poverty, the lessening of disparities between regions and classes, the building up of technological infrastructure, and modernization of society through shedding feudalism, tribalism and superstitions, and the gradual achievement of economic self-reliance” (Ganesh, 1994: 83, cited in Joshi and Bendre, 2010: 2). Another prominent scholar of development studies and noble prize laureate, Sen (1999:4) defined development in term of “removal of major sources of “unfreedom.” According to Sen, major source of unfreedom includes among others poverty, tyrannical government, poor economic opportunities or unemployment, existence of systematic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities as well as existence of repressive states, starvation or inadequate nutrition, absence of remedies for curable illnesses, and insufficient public amenities such as the absence of epidemiological programs, or planned arrangements for healthcare or educational facilities as well as absence of effective institutions for the maintenance of local peace and order. The above three definitions of development indicate that development is not unidirectional phenomenon rather it encompasses

technological, social, economical, cultural and political changes. These changes can be normative that is, shedding of tribalism and superstitions which are aimed at transforming societal value and norm and non-normative which describe the institutional sophistication of a given society without proposing an interventionist model to alter the pre-existing societal value and norm.

Regardless of its long history, global domination of the term development was started after the World War II, when President Henry Truman of United State of America proposes his mission of developing the underdeveloped countries of the south (Sachs, 2010: xvii). During these periods, development was conceptualized only in term of narrow economic dimension, particularly in term of the rise in the real Growth Domestic Product (GDP) of a country. Such conceptualisation of the term in term of statistical lenses was re-considered with the new approach to development as proposed by Dudley Seer who argues that genuine development should reduce inequality, poverty and unemployment. This new conceptualisation of the term was powerfully pursued in the 1960s and 1970s, leading to the emergence of the notions of basic human needs approach. Similarly, in 1980s the concept of sustainable development was also emerging as a new dimension to the development concepts. The concept of endogenous development which advocates for the locally grown development agenda as oppose to the traditional top-down development agenda was also endorsed during these decades. These new concepts were given international recognition after formerly colonized nation's plea for reconsideration and reformulation of development concepts (Sakamota, 2003: 4). Finally, the 1995 world summit for Social development refined the concept of development by globally recognizing incorporation of the social and cultural dimensions of development (Sakamota, 2003:3) besides the traditional economic centred understanding of the term. The following section of the paper briefly discusses historical and current conceptualisation of development with its implication on development issues in Africa.

Social aspects of development

Historically, there were numerous arguments with regard to social aspects of development. The dominant line of arguments was from the field of sociology which was emerging from the 18th and 19th centuries onwards. Since then, there have been so many views about what really constitutes social development. Herbert Spencer, who came up with the theory of naturalism from the idea of Darwinian Theory of Survival, argues that social development is the natural ability of society to adapt to the new environmental condition. According to Spencer, those who adapted to the new environmental conditions prior to the rest societies are developed and those who could not adapt to new environmental conditions remain

undeveloped. This theory justifies the reason why the more developed western societies move beyond their territories to fasten the development of those who fail to adapt to "new environmental conditions" through the process of colonization (Willis, 2005: 116).

Another French sociologist Emile Durkheim also argued that, social development is the shift from the traditional societies which are characterized by a rigid social system like kinship, clan and communal relationship to modern societies which are characterized by more liberal individualist in which there is no rigid traditional social relationship like kin, clan and communal life (Willis, 2005: 117). According to this view, society should reject or violate their traditional system and adapt the liberal individualist system of the western societies.

Another important theory is the modernization theory developed by W.W. Rostow (1960) who argued that traditional or cultural practices are antithetical to social development. Rostow, in his modernization theory, argued that cultural practices are based on irrational "collective" and "traditional" ways of life and hence, could not fit to the individualistic capitalist mode of development which is based on the division of labour (Willis, 2005:116). Modernization theory suggests that there is only one unilateral ladder that leads to development. The ladder through which the western developed capitalist societies had gone and Rostow argued the rest underdeveloped societies of the world, irrespective of their social and cultural differences should follow the same ladder of development. The essence of all these early theories of development has been aimed at imposing some externally justified values to direct the colonized nation towards some predetermined state of affairs to preserve their survival. This pre-determined state of affairs is the prescription given for development from the Eurocentric view points. This Eurocentric view of development has been serving as the tools of legitimacy in the European colonization of the rest nations of the world. It is right then to argue that, under the guise of the term development, there were social and cultural colonization and imposition of western values which paved the ways for the diffusion of idea, values and norms from north to south producing cultural and societal incoherence in the colonized nations of Africa. This line of arguments, then legitimizes the idea that colonialism is one of the major causes for underdevelopment of Africa. The century old project of undermining African social and cultural norm through imposition of western values and norms made Africa devoid of the necessary social and cultural building blocks conducive to trigger social development in the continents very easily.

Similarly, in the developing countries, the policy makers and development workers have been continually deriving their development model from the one curved by western countries which further undermine social and cultural values and norms of the people in the peripheral parts of the African like pastoralist

communities. The long term effects of these projects proved to be unsustainable and finally international organizations and leading international actors resort to the concept of endogenous development since 1960s and 1970s onwards. According to World Bank (1997: 9), social development can be defined "positively" and "normatively". Positively, "social development simply refers to the condition of the people, their level of education and quality of life, and quality and sustainability of their relationship and institutions." This definition is confined to describe peoples' social conditions and level of their sophistication in term of quality of life, quality of education and quality of their institutions. It does not signify any intervention to alter their state of affairs. Normative definition on the other hand, emphasizes on the "social goal and objectives like poverty reduction, creation of employment, human resource development through education, development of social justice and nonviolence and equality". Here, the aim is to "improve" the living standard of the people through development intervention. This is normative because the goal is to push the societies towards the predetermined state of affairs which proved to be unsustainable in the recent decades.

Similarly, the world leaders' summit of Copenhagen in 1995 reached the consensus and adopted the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development which includes among others the following issues; to create a framework for development that is dedicated to the eradication of poverty and that increases the resources spent on education and health. In addition, they pledged to support development that is people-centred and participatory; that takes account of diversity; that is pluralistic, non-discriminatory, and gender sensitive; that promotes accountability and transparency in government; and that builds the capacity of all development actors, including the state, the private sector, and civil society. They affirmed that economic and social goals are inextricably linked and that both economic and social factors contribute to sustainable development (United Nations, 1996: 8-15). As indicated previously, there has been a continuous change in the conceptualisation of the social dimension of development which ranges from radically changing cultural values and norms on the basis of the traditional believe that western values and norms are more conducive to trigger development agenda in Africa to a clear recognition of the involvement of the people in the developmental issues for sustainable and positive outcome of development work. Unlike its traditional conceptualisation, social development today covers a wide range of issues which have been neglected for many years. The incorporation of social dimension into a long existing development discourse brought into the attention of policy makers and intellectuals the need to incorporate staggering social problems like malnutrition, tyrannical government, and security issues into a mainstream development discourse. Today, social development is highly related to the idea of sustainable

development which brings social, cultural, economic and environmental issues together enforcing the realization of one another.

Cultural aspects of development

Culture and development are interrelated concepts. Developments from the cultural perspectives are recently included into development discourses. According to Marana (2010: 4), "Culture, always seen as a complex issue and socially and politically highly sensitive, has nowadays become a cliché, used abundantly in almost all contexts of our reality (political, social, educational, economic, etc.)". As indicated here very clearly, culture influences all aspects of the society's wellbeing which include political, social, educational and economic issues in general. Culture is an integral part of social-cultural and economic transformation of a given society. The question that has to be answered here is how the relationship between culture and development has been dealt with in the development discourses? To answer these questions, it is imperative to begin with the definition of the term culture. According to the UNESCO cited in Schalkwyk (2000:1) "Culture is the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or a social group. It includes not only the arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs." This is a holistic aspect of culture which includes all endeavors of the society. This holistic nature of culture confirms that anything that embarked on the change of the society should also take into account the culture of the society into consideration to fully understand the effect of the change on the society. In other word, culture includes all aspects of the societal life which are regarded as normal and conventional and accepted values by the society as a valuable and important. Change in these accepted values will produce some impacts on the culture and the society bearing that culture as well (Grincheva, 2014: 11).

There are different scholarly arguments with regard to the links between culture and development. Different scholarly work on this issue indicated that there is a positive link between culture and development. The study conducted by one of the UNESCO expertise argued this positive relationship as follows:

"The relationship between culture and development started to be defended by different experts in the 1970s although, it was not until the 1980s or even the 1990s when the international bodies and development cooperation agencies started to promote studies and work to analyse how cultural factors could have an impact on the development processes" (Marana, 2010: 4).

The above quotation indicates that the conceptualisation of development from a cultural perspective is a recent

phenomenon. There has been many development plans and projects executed without taking into consideration the cultural dimensions of its consequences. This was because, for many years, the two concepts has been understood as incompatible by many development practitioners and believed that it was impossible to blend cultures and development together (Marana, 2010: 1). The idea of considering culture as part and parcel of development discourses was initiated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and subsequently other United Nations organizations like United Nations Development Program, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development begun to consider the role of culture in their development and project plans (Marana, 2010: 3). Unlike the previous approach to development that excludes the role and significance of culture, the new conceptualisation of development has recognized the unique place of the culture in the development plan, project and strategies. The argument goes, then that many development projects failed because of its lack of integration of culture and development plan (Johnson, 1998: 1). This shortcoming of development concept was recognized at the 1985 world conference when the need to develop a new agenda on development which goes beyond the traditional narrow approach to development was discussed and adopted. In 1994, The Secretariat of the World Decade for Cultural Development at United Nation Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, stated when reiterating the significance of culture in development as follows:

"By taking the cultural dimension of development into account, we mean the need to conceive development efforts in such a way that actions correspond to the aspirations of the community concerned, that the community's know-how is put to use and that our efforts are not isolated (that is, not replicable without further external help), but on the contrary can create multiplying effects. In order to conceive development plans or projects that take these factors into account, the population concerned needs to be closely involved in all phases of development". (Cited in Johnson, 1998: 1).

This is to say that development and culture are becoming the two sides of the same coin. Accordingly, any development work that is aiming at improving or changing the social condition of a given society should derive its guiding principles from the view and aspiration constituents of peoples' wellbeing has now become the center to conceptualize the development and also understood very important factors for the success of the development goals.

Conclusion

Development concept has been changing not only in

term of its concept, but also its scope. It has also been losing its original conceptualisation with the change at international level. The end of colonization and the subsequent emergence of the third world countries as an independent nations with their own different interest to be respected globally in the 1960s and 1970s led to a significant change in its conceptualisation. Its original mission of imposing Eurocentric view has been lessened by recognition and concern for the culture, values and norms of the people receiving development work through endorsement of the concept of endogenous development. In the last decades, international organizations such as UNESCO and UNDP in particular have been advocating for the profound recognition and incorporation of the peoples' culture and values in any development project that is aimed at changing the life of the people. When the peoples' values and interest are taken into consideration, the study indicated that there is a high probability to get an outcome that will satisfy the community's interest for which the development is meant. Currently, development is a concept with more neutral objectives even if there are always some vested interests of those initiating the development work worldwide. Defining development narrowly from the countries' Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is an old fashioned concept today. Development is equal to freedom of choice, opportunities on all essential issues like healthcare, education, nutrition, access to basic necessities and freedom of expressions and freedom from domination of all kinds, including tyrannical government and cultural imperialism through imposition of an alien culture or ways of life. This study recommends that nowadays development works/project should not be preoccupied with the old approach of transferring values and norms from one corner of the earth to another. It has been confirmed by many international organizations that any development that is implemented based on ideas and methods identified by the external agents are less successful than the one which is curved and owned by the society that the development is meant for. The idea and methods developed to execute development work should be compatible with the norms, values and culture of the peoples subjected to it.

This paper thus recommends that for development works to be successful in addressing the goal for why it is proposed, it has to be free from externally imposed interests and ideas and take more ingredients from the peoples receiving the development work.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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