Review

Advancing the development agenda: Options

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Apparently, our schools and universities produce a lot of educated youths. However, there seems to be a mismatch of the content of the education and the stage at which we are in terms of economic modernisation, and the very content of our economy. Perhaps our schools' curricula should be re-examined and redone to calibrate them accordingly and with prospects which are natural in the part of the globe in which we are situated, and let them arise from our time-tested indigenous approaches to the main issues of the moment.

Key words: Youth, education, folk orientations, development, natural resources according to locales.

INTRODUCTION

Being aware of the risks produced by the wreckage of social fabrics, neglect suffered by millions of people around the globe who barely survive, and the magnitude of deficiencies which prevent many from realising their imagination, intelligence and sensitivity potential in order to achieve improvement in their living conditions, their families and communities, the United Nations Organisation issued a statement in the year 2000. Supported by 147 governments, it established the so-called "*Millennium Goals*," which were meant to be fulfilled by the year 2015 (United Nations Organisation, 2000). The "*Millennium Goals*," statement, is considered to be the *minimum point of departure* for governments.

We are considering how *the youths* may be more involved in this United Nations' scheme.[1] On who is a youth, we have restricted the term to its chronological connotation. A youth is not being necessarily young; it is he who is in the period of life when he is still learning the societal roles he will play in the society of grown-ups. By the term "development" we allude to the acquisition of what it takes a given system to deliver what it is meant to deliver. The development of a society would mean changes which it undergoes in the sense of instruments and infrastructure it acquires as are required to enable it to effectively serve its *raison d'être*, namely, to enable a liveable life for its members and the possibility of societal

regeneration. The term "liveable life for its members and the possibility of societal regeneration" is a very elastic term. The characterisation of a life as liveable and the possibility of societal regeneration are a function of the part of the world one considers at a given time.

From this premiss we propose to mull over the incidence of the education or training of the youth on the development of society as a whole – the implication of the training that the youths acquire on the development of the society. We think of the youth as some entity who has to undergo "transformation" to prepare him for some role in the processes; out of which society meets his needs and for the very process of societal regeneration when, in time, the youth replaces grown ups whose energy and resourcefulness have diminished.

The youths may be enjoined to be responsible and reasoned [rational and measured] in any initiative he undertakes. But responsibility in posture and being reasoned in initiative arise from teachings the youth acquired from their parents and the kind and quality of education their parents and the society could give them. The question we propose for consideration is that of the creation of a context for a liveable life.

The contribution of youths to development in the society would not be specific things the youth should do or their specific enterprise. When youths are considered in relation to development, it is in the sense that the sector from which society's personnel in the professions and all walks of life are recruited; proper education and

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[1]The eighth of the goals, namely, the attainment of global partnership for development.

purpose-directed training-instruments of empowerment– for the youth are sure guarantors of development.

Development approaches

All great civilisations have, at one time or another, over-whelmed and colonised other societies by peaceful means or military conquest. Interesting to notice is the fact that, in many cases, these desired or forced contact situations provoke changes in the material base of a society, such as the absorption of new techniques in military and economic fields. Even the most archaic societies have undergone change through a process of diffusion, that is through migration or conquest, and or more usually, through cultural or economic contact with neighbouring tribes (Mair, 1965).

Traditional societies, whose analysis has been of crucial importance in studies of *modernisation*, are of special interest. The societies that have been designated as "traditional" vary widely, from so-called primitive societies to the differing literate societies. Whatever the difference between different traditional societies, they all share the acceptance of tradition of the *givenness* of some actual or symbolic past event, order, or figure as the major hub of their collective identity, as the delineation of the scope and nature of the social and cultural order and as the eventual legitimator of change of the limits of innovation. It is these cultural definitions of tradition as a basic criterion of social activity, as the basic referent of collective identity, and as the delineator of the definition of the societal and cultural orders – of the symbols of the collective and personal identity and degree of variability – that constitute the essence of traditionality (Eisenstadt, 1973).

A common view relates the European initiative to colonise the world as part of a "civilising mission." The French government, for instance, portrayed its colonial practice as "*rayonnement*," lighting the way for others (Cole and Raymond, 2006:158-159). In the colonies subjects were taught that they were colonised for their own good and that their societies would advance as a result. In Britain, citizens were encouraged to take up so-called *white man's burden* of bringing civilisation to the *savage* (Easterly, 2006).

Social scientists would not dispute that this was one of the reasons colonisers gave to explain their actions. But they would question why this moral mission became so important to Europeans in the 19th century. Was it because of the economic and social condition in the colonising countries? They would then point to a number of aspects of the imperial expansion which requires more detailed examination, namely;

1. The need to find markets for the products of European industrial developments
2. The demand for tropical products such as palm oil and cotton as inputs to the manufacture of cheap soaps, margarine and textiles for an expanding home market as workers moved into growing towns at home
3. The related needs of cheap labour in the colonies in order to produce these tropical products
4. Strategic territory-grabbing by Europeans powers who were in competition with each other for the resources of these lands

How these factors actually affected any particular act of colonisation was specific to each case. But in each case, it was important that the colonies contributed to their own colonial government by producing crops or minerals for sale in the world market.

In relation to the colonial enterprise and related social events, Lenin et al. (2005) developed the idea that empires were not benign political outgrowths of European civilisation. Instead, colonialism was an exploitative system of economic, social and political relations which, while changing the colonised societies economically, socially and culturally, changed them in order that they could provide cheap inputs to production in capitalist societies as well as markets for their products. This arrangement always worked to the advantage of the colonial power (Hobson, 1965; Nzula et al., 1979). Beneath the explicit "civilising influence" lies definite economic interests.

The need to produce in a new way and on a large scale for a market gave rise to a problem. Local people were frequently quite reluctant to be "civilised," to produce for sale, or to work on plantations or in mines: there were many cases of fierce opposition to colonisation. The Asante people of Ghana waged a major war against the British as did the Zulu people of South Africa (Hunter, 1962). Apart from these spectacular manifestations of opposition, there were many others which were rather muted – like refusing to work. Colonial governments' response to them was to force them to work by imposing taxes which could only be paid in cash and this cash could only be earned by going to work as a labour migrant, or by growing cash crops which could be sold for cash, like palm trees from which palm nuts for palm oil is obtained, or indigo plants which form the basis for blue dyes which are in demand in the textile industries.

The colonial interlude was the beginning of the process whereby new relations of production and new social categories were being established. With the spread of cash-cropping, a new process of "peasantisation" occurred, and in this process the exotic subsistence producing "savages" of the 19th century and early 20th century sociology and anthropology gradually became transformed into "peasants" and "workers." With specific reference to the colonial period in Africa, contact with the

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Market economy of the west generated complex situations of change and transition. The introduction of cash crops like tea, coffee, cocoa and cotton, or vegetable and food production near urban centres and rural markets transformed the material and functional context of subsistence economies. Gradually, production by small-plot farmers and cash exchanges penetrated the rural economy.

The gradual monetisation of the barter economy, the availability of industrial consumption goods, production instruments and other inputs [on these occasions, they were labelled "inducement goods"] confronted the peasants and their families with a new assortment of artefacts and status symbols. New employment opportunities, such as salaried work, gave an added prompting to the monetisation of transactions. They familiarised even more people with the functioning of markets at times, with the variable price formations of a market economy. Cultural and social factors, such as ceremonial exchange, gifts to senior relatives, land tenure system, bride-price, and such others continued to be important, but they underwent a notable change by their monetisation. The adoption of market paradigms built upon the principle of the accumulation of private gains has become the driving force and organisational basis for social life in these new countries. The impact of this *event* can be explained as a social *trauma*,[2] a change that was very difficult to assimilate and which profoundly affected social relations, civil and political organisations, the economies and culture of the societies that emerged from it. Any listing is incomplete, but it is clear that the resulting scenery throws an image of power struggles, social exclusions, unfathomable greed and immense lacks. The inequality in the recognition of ethnic differences; of access to indispensable goods and services for the existence of a dignified human life, as well as the constraints in the access to symbolic assets, generate discontent and civil strife.

Superstructural acculturation may also occur, especially in a situation of *development* speeded up by the import of models and means from outside societies. The indigenous material infrastructure, as well as the cultural superstructure, will then have to feel around through long periods of acculturation characterised by varying assortments as much as a mismatch of elements. Normally, however, societies proceed to endogenous constructions of reality and to self-provided means to meet their set goals. Except in revolutionary times, development evolves in a piecemeal and gradual manner. In such cases development equals evolution.

In the more lofty views of history, such as those of

Arnold Toynbee, the working of ideas constitutes the main interpretative theme. Religion, culture and secular ideologies are major, lasting forces since they embodied more or less coherent constructions of reality. However, when they meet with opposing traditions inside or outside their own society, the seeds of change are sown and new situations arise with different outcomes: surrendering to the stronger culture; the creation of a new synthesis; or the revival of the founding historical tradition.

In the post-war world, an international actor, namely, the United Nations Organisation entered the world stage. After gaining independence, most new nations became members of this institution but from the beginning, the peace mission of the United Nations Organisation was handicapped by Cold War conflict. The United Nations Organisation was therefore obliged to transform its goals and become an international bureaucracy engaged in *development*. Although wielding no real power and limited to the formulation of guide-lines under the form of recommendations, the United Nations Organisation continues to influence greatly the field of international *development*. It plays the role of an ongoing forum and world-wide teach-in on *development* for the new nations, and helps to make known the original theories and strategies elaborated by some of the specialised and regional agencies (Baeck, 1993: 21).

Entering the school

Long before developmentalism became an outspoken credo, colonial policy-makers and administrators had been confronted with its theoretical and practical problems. Mostly, the metropolitan government's primary concern was its own national interest. Religious missionaries, who for some cases preceded colonialists, however, were moved by a more noble idea. In a series of encyclicals, the Roman Catholic Church, for instance, specifically professed that from her vantage point, development was not only a collective achievement towards higher material welfare but also should contribute to the promotion of human dignity. In addition to their pastoral task, the missionaries took the lead in education, health services, and pioneered, in a fragmentary but efficient manner, rural and urban extension work at the grass roots.

In the 1930s, more progressive ideas on social and economic welfare reached the colonies. With a remarkable sense of prophesy, the British Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1939 stated: "development and welfare will be the cry of the generation that follows the present one." After the Second World War, the ferment of these ideas led to a change in the accepted wisdom of colonial trusteeship.

In the era of colonial rule, in schools colonialists taught

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[2]Alexander et al. (2004) used the term to relate the impact of the disappearance of the Soviet system on societies which used to be organised according to principles of collective ownership of the means of production.

the colonised how to count and read and write. This enabled them to communicate with their subjects and to manage them as labour in the exploitation of the natural resources of the territories under their control. Later, when it arose that the colonised would have to be given independence some day, the need to get more people to go to school and for more education and in various domains arose and was addressed.

In the natural posture of the colonised, whose concerns were primitive farming, food gathering and hunting in which offspring were valued as essential labour around and the girl child was a direct event of social structure when the group married its sons, involvement in colonial enterprise was a skewed activity and was quite senseless.

A first problem of the colonialists was thus that of getting the school accepted for what it served. In the interest of the colonial economy, they resorted to inducements of various sorts and in some cases, to force (Richards, 1977). Several decades since political independence, in the 21st century, the development of the school among us is still an acute problem.

The Africa that emerged

African political leaders have accepted with enthusiasm the aim of economic development. But African societies, shaped by their earlier and quite different necessities, still contain within them, as living forces, the personal attitudes and social institutions of the older world.

A scheme which has as its objective improvement in this condition must begin from a careful consideration of the facts – the reality – at a given time. Necessarily, it would involve a consideration of the world-view[3] of the people of a given place, distinctive activities which take place in the place, how these activities fit together, what may be the most important factor which explains the condition and the level of life in a place, communication with communities in the neighbourhood and with the nearest urban centres.

Presently, we consider the situation in a typical countryside in the rain forests of southern Cameroon. In the school the pupil learns how to read, write, and be able to count. Out of school he is part of the domestic labour. Unavoidably he is part of the industry of the family as a hand in farm work and sometimes in fishing and hunting. For sources of cash, the family may entertain a number of plantations of cash-earning produce like cocoa, and oil palm. Surplus food crops like groundnuts and cassava may also be sold for cash. Income from these activities enables the family to acquire some additional primary needs like fuel for their lamps, soaps with which to wash

clothes, sometimes drugs for common illnesses and for some school needs for those who go to school. Let us say, we here have a typical instance of an economy of subsistence.

A casual examination would reveal a basic logic beneath the order of subsistence. Production is essentially for the satisfaction of first needs, namely, food for mouths to be fed, and welfare for a liveable continued subsistence. The level of production is strictly tied to the seasons. Towards periods of rains, the fields are prepared for cultivation, and during the dry season the previous harvests are consumed. The harvests must be consumed for lack of facilities which would enable preservation and poor communication with urban centres in which they may be sold for cash. In this situation it is impossible to accumulate resources for a spread use. If preservation [and of course accumulation] were possible, this would enable the peasant to engage in wider industry and in more than one domains and subsistence cultivation. There would be prospects for expansion in resources, for higher levels of life and perhaps for investments for expanded production even if it would be in the domain of labour in larger-sized plantations.

What we propose

Presently, in schools, there seems to be very many things in education which we get but very few of these things relate to our common needs and the resources available in nature in the environment in which we live. The result is that we get so much education but do not have options of activity in which our education can be gainfully put. In this situation, faced with the exigency of living, the individual gets into a search for activity, trying his hand in one trade today, then in another one day in and day out.

We think that this is a waste of resources and can be avoided. Assuming that the basic school where one learns how to count and the alphabet of the language in use is available for a great majority of Cameroonians, the content of secondary school education and the manner of its delivery can be re-examined to figure out in what manner it can be tampered with to make it directly relevant in the contexts in which we live. This cannot be done in isolation: it necessarily will take a critical view of what we have in our economy at a given time, and the level of its development.

When an individual acquires learning but cannot get into some profitable activity because he did not learn how he could put his learning into practical use, or because there simply are no sectors in the existing economy in which he could put it into use, or again and increasingly because there are no existing mechanisms in terms of policies and schemes to assist him into some activity, he

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[3] System of values, customary approaches, folk view.

resorts to trying his hand in assorted trades, and for most of the time in things for which he has no education nor training, relying on his practical sense and things like that. The prospects of success in this approach are poor and non-success leads always to discouragement, massive migration towards urban centres leading to the overcrowding of cities, various unnameable activities including sex for cash, homosexual prostitution, crime for wealth, gambling, idleness and the consumption of "euphorisants" and such other quite distressing nuisances.

Our interest in what we have called the world-view of a people – which may be referred to as the horizon of the people is that, the common practices in relation to production are usually customary practices which have always been among the people since ancestral times. For their non-exposure to other ways of doing things, in their majority, they are not aware of the existence of other ways. Any action for development should have as an important element in its conception, a thought-out approach to a kind of education which takes into account customary approaches and the pool of wisdom in indigenous systems of knowledge.

The school in its present form needs a re-examination, and a "tuning in," to relate it to the immediate contexts of our lives – the specific needs for life in a rain forest, according to the resources we can readily access in the part of the globe in which we live.

In order to maximise the productivity of rural human resources school curricula as well as "non-formal" educational opportunities for school dropouts and adults need to be directed more towards the occupational requirements of rural inhabitants whether in small farm agriculture, nonfarm artisan and entrepreneurial activity, or in rural public and commercial services. Such curricula and task-related reorientations of rural learning systems, however, will not be effective in eliciting popular support unless rural economic opportunities are created through which small farmers, artisans, and entrepreneurs take advantage of their vocational knowledge and training. Without these incentives, people will justifiably view such formal and non-formal occupational training programmes with considerable scepticism.

This "tuning in" must need take into account the world-views of the different peoples of the named places and the resourcefulness of the institutions of the land. Specific questions which may be addressed are:
Education for what?
Education for whom?
What approach to education?
Education how?

To make an accurate diagnosis of the present phenol-menon of inadequacy is, as our original reflections suggest, an urgent task. We do have to consider that the process of dismantling indigenous systems has affected our social institutions, particularly in the role they should play in the guidance on the path to achievements. It has also had a detrimental effect upon the formation of skilled individuals according to the professions, and individuals of wisdom, by limiting their critical and creative capa-cities, as well as by confining their possibilities of having a say in the processes of planning and executing projects that might be crucial for the transformation of society (Wallerstein, 1998: 2001; González , 2001). All this, as we know, is part of the deterioration of education in general, at all levels, as well as of the risks that threaten the existence of a public space from which social welfare would be conceived and implemented.

In order to carry out the task of diagnosis and the elaboration of proposals to overcome backwardness, the contribution of men of wisdom of a certain kind, wherever they may be found is required, but above all, it is also equally urgent that we manage to listen to the voice of citizens and communities, so that we can properly assume their demands and propose probable solutions.

A reasoned policy on education is an urgent need for any society and should be an obsession to its leaders if they are thoughtful about a meaningful legacy for posterity.

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