

The essence of development essay



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When we speak of development the general tendency is to measure it in terms of monetary gains or income. Development is basically seen as a phenomenon that eradicates poverty and ushers in prosperity through the accumulation of greater money and wealth that in turn accords people higher buying capacity. Yet professional economics has never based the definition of development only on wealth and income. "... the origin of economics was significantly motivated by the need to study the assessment of, and causal influences on the opportunities that people have for good living" (Sen, 1999).

Aristotle's focus on 'flourishing' and 'capacity' and Adam Smith's analysis of 'necessities' and 'conditions of living' go far beyond the narrow confines of profit and income to what is termed the freedom-centered perspective of development by Sen (1999). This perspective and the approach based on 'quality of life' are essentially similar in that they are not restricted or limited to the resources or wealth of an individual but many other essential factors that go to make life more satisfying and fulfilling.

The Industrial Revolution changed the way of life in the West. It defined an economy based on production and consumerism. For a long time since the 18th Century the world wallowed in its one-dimensional view of development and progress. As the negative effects of development primarily based on industrialization became obvious, the fundamental holistic approach of economics again found expression in what is now known as Sustainable Development.

Sustainable Development is defined as “ development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (United Nations, 1992). This definition of Sustainable Development itself draws attention to the necessity of preserving resources that are required for development, and it doing so, also admits that the development that had been taking place in the past had failed concentrated on optimal utilization of resources with an eye on conservation and the future.

This in turn leads us to factors of ecology and the interdependence between human beings and the environment. In 1996, the concept of ‘ human development’ was introduced by the United Nations. Similar to the Quality of Life and freedom-centered approach, human development takes into consideration all aspects of an individual’s life that are related to the well being of the individual. These would include economic growth as well as access to education, medical care, civic facilities, and other factors which add up to make life better.

The relationship between human development and economic growth has been defined thus: “ human development is the end—economic growth a means” (UNDP, 1996). Human development actually takes all facets of making life more meaningful, worthwhile and sustainable into consideration. This holistic approach to development would have to include four primary aspects: social, economic, environmental and technological. These aspects are interrelated and have to work in tandem if actual development is to take place.

The social aspect involves society and societal factors such as culture and tradition which could vary across different societies; the economic aspect could also vary depending on the type of economy of a particular place or society; the environmental aspect relates to the ecology and maintaining the delicate balance with nature; and the technology aspect, even though seeming to be uniform and universal, could vary in choice of application and utilization. Development that destroys the social fabric while concentrating only on economic growth would never be sustainable.

Similarly, random application of technology could usher in economic development at the cost of the environment and ecology. On the other hand, sticking obstinately to ways of life that cuts a region off from the rest of the world for the sake of culture and tradition would also deprive the inhabitants of the isolated region of many advantages that balanced development could bring. 'Balance' is therefore the catchword that has to be maintained between the four primary aspects of real development.

It is in the context of varying circumstances, economic, social, political and environmental, that the question of the yardstick of measurement comes in. Speaking on lack of basic comforts, illiteracy, and lack of communication with the outside world in the traditional Ladakhi society, Norberg-Hodge (1991) states these perceived deficiencies "... are not quite as they appear when viewed from an outside perspective. Using Western Yardsticks can be very misleading. Over the years, through intimate contact with the Ladakhi society, I have come to see these limitations in a rather different light."

The Ladakhi did not need the comforts because the hardships were not perceived as hardships but as usual ways of going about life; illiteracy did not deprive the individual from participating in making decisions that affected his or her life, and communication with the outside world did not matter much because people felt that “ the centre (of life) was where they were,” (Norberg-Hodge 1991) not somewhere else from which they had to draw the vitality and joy of life. Development is therefore contextual, and has to be intrinsic to the society and the environment in which it takes place.

This paper postulates that real development can be defined as intrinsic development contextual to the locale, circumstances, society and environment in which it takes place. **The Advantages of Development**
Development can bring many advantages to the people of the region where the development takes place. In today’s world of globalization, development inevitably comes hand in hand with establishing contacts and communication links with the rest of the world. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) plays a crucial part in bringing the world together digitally.

The impact of physical contacts and linking together are however felt more. This is evident in the case of the 1, 300 km long Karakoram Highway (KKH) that runs from the Pakistani capital of Islamabad through the Karakoram mountain ranges in northern Pakistan to China (Audio 1). The KKH has made the vast torturous tracts of northern Pakistan easily accessible to the outside world. This has resulted in the very rapid development of small towns like Gilgit. Gilgit has assumed the status of a commercial centre with fast-paced development of trade.

Goods are now transported easily over the KKH to Gilgit from the lowlands of Pakistan. Merchants also bring their products to Gilgit and have settled down in the town. People of Gilgit have taken advantage of the situation by growing products that are more in demand in the lowlands. They have switched from cultivating grains to cultivating potatoes to cater to the markets in the lowlands. They have also taken to new businesses such as selling of gas canisters, vehicle maintenance, etc. , that have become viable with the coming of the KKH.

As a result, the people of Gilgit are earning more and are able to afford the consumer products that are flooding their markets. Digital communication links have also opened up new avenues of development. Call centers that cater to customers in the West is a flourishing business in India. In fact, Information Technology Enabled Services is set to be the highest employment generator, and is expected to generate about 20 million jobs by 2020 (Mitter et. al.). The majority of workers in the call centers are women who are paid comparatively higher wages.

The skill set required to work in call centers is also comparatively easier and less expensive to acquire than traditional software development or other export-import related skills. Yet, changing technology that induces change in skills and the growing lobby against offshore outsourcing make call centers a short term if not a precarious occupation. A big advantage of development has been the introduction of formal education in areas where education had not been available before. This has opened the doors to self improvement better career prospects for all succeeding generations.

Thanks to the development ushered in by the KKH, there is a school in the Belarus valley in Pakistan now. The school in Bakrot valley has in many ways liberated the girl student from the shackles of Islamic restrictions. A combination of secular and religious education has been welcomed by the residents, and parents are sending their daughters to school. Students are learning English besides the Koranic language Arabic and the official Pakistani language Urdu. Education promises to broaden the views of the students and make them better adapted to a changing world. Growth in tourism is another boon of development.

Karinabad in the Karokorams has become a major tourist attraction drawing a large number of tourists every year. Tourists, especially foreign tourists, spend a lot of money, providing various business opportunities to the locals. Ali Ahmed does business selling mountaineering climbing gear and equipment to tourists who come to climb the mountains of the Karakoram. Hotels have sprung up, and ethnic souvenir making and weaving centers have also been set up to cater to the tourists. Finally, traditional enterprise such as agriculture has also benefited from the technology transfer that has accompanied development.

Water is a scarce commodity in the Karakorams. A modern irrigation system has ensured that water is available to all farmers. Agriculture has been modernized with the mechanized tractor replacing the oxen-drawn plough and the introduction of fertilizers. The Disadvantages of Development When not properly balanced, the advantages of development can turn into disastrous disadvantages. The commercialization of traditional societies runs

havoc with the finely-tuned subsistence and support systems of such societies. Ladakh is an example of such disruptions of development.

Traditionally, the Ladakhis believed in the interdependence of the various elements of the environment. They practice making the most use of available resources without squandering them. The scale of things was small enough to be comprehensible and manageable to the Ladakhis. The traditional Ladakhi society was a self-sustaining and independent economic unit even in the extreme and adverse conditions of the environment of its location. Cultural traditions of limited population growth help to ensure natural caring capacity of land is not exceeded. 90% own land passed on intact from generation to generation (Audio 2 on Ladakh).

Agriculture was practiced in a co-operative basis marked by sharing of labor within the community. The villagers had surplus produce to indulge in making and drinking beer. With the advent of modernization and development however, people became individualistic. The society lost its community orientation, and totters on the verge of breakdown. The consequences have been many and wide ranging. Commodities transported from outside the region have become cheaper compared to local productions because of subsidies in transportation. As a result, production of local produce and commodities has come to a halt.

Ladakh has become dependent on outside sources of supply. The society can no longer control production or the market. Things have gone out of hand. The control has shifted to specific institutions having global reach such as the World Bank and the GATT. Institutions which believes in the blinkered

single destructive consumer monoculture of development (Audio 3 of Interview with author) The traditional connection with the environment has also snapped. Housing colonies have been built with scant regard to the available resources. Concrete has taken over from the locally available materials such as timber and baked mud-and-grass bricks.

The physical environment has deteriorated because of the traffic pollution and the production of non-degradable wastes and garbage. The old dictum of ‘ what comes from the earth, goes back to the earth,’ holds no more. Even the stream water is polluted because of the plastic waste. The available water is not adequate to serve the population. The situation is very similar in the Karakoram where the effort to supply timber to the lowlands has large scale destruction of forests and extinction of rare local species of flora and fauna such as the ibex.