SOME ISSUES OF DEVELOPMENT PLANNING IN EAST AFRICA

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Ideas about development and development itself have a somewhat peculiar relationship which has been a constant subject for debate in this and the last century.

Marxism asserts that the economic 'substructure' is the source of 'ideas'. It challenges the notion that 'ideas' can ever constitute the prime mover leading to materialistic, historical development and the attendant superstructure. Marxism nonetheless concedes that once ideas have been formed they have some limited influence on subsequent development.

This theory in its purest form has probably failed to carry conviction if only because within the limited historical span since its elucidation there appears to have been no conclusive evidence of its validity. Whatever may be the ultimate judgement, for or against, the theory will, albeit in a modified form, remain of some value to humanity in its aspirations to development. The theory will not allow us to forget the social and economic diversity which gives each political unit of the world map a character of its own. The peculiar characteristics of each unit require that, if positive development is going to result, full consideration of those unique characteristics be made. We are further reminded that ready-made theories of development either imported or copied will be of marginal or at times neutral or negative effect if applied to a totally alien situation to that which gave rise to these 'ideas'.

There is still a widespread fallacy that ideas about development possess qualities of universal applicability and that they can be borrowed from one country or situation and applied to another at will. This is not to say that to transfer ideas is necessarily a bad thing and should be discouraged. My contention is that ideas should never and can never be the starting point of development. The starting point properly belongs in the study and analysis of the nature and characteristic of the total situation under development. This phrase underlines the fact that development is an independent and continuous process; and that any organized form of development merely supplements but does not constitute development itself.

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The development of a country does not merely consist in the exploitation of its potential natural material wealth. This is only one facet. It also includes the evolution and refinement of the cultural, psychological and spiritual aspects of a nation. These latter characteristics are, to a large extent, the ones which give a nation its distinguishing characteristics or personality. Nonetheless, they are the ones which regrettably are least understood by those whose task it is to institute and direct the machinery for development.

In certain developing countries therefore you find people have concentrated their efforts on what they think is development but in actual fact is economic growth, although the two are totally different. Economic growth in simple terms could mean increased production—industrial or otherwise. It does not necessarily involve the masses of people so that today although Kuwait in one sense is the richest country in the world, nevertheless, in other and more important ways, East Africa might be more developed than Kuwait or than any of the numerous Sheikhdoms in the Persian Gulf endowed with oil but not development.

Real development consists in a change for the better—better farms, better implements, better crops, better yields, better incomes for the people, better houses, better food. When in a country a situation arises where the above changes take place for the masses of its people then you can say that that country is undergoing development. That is why there must always be doubt about a country where a high economic rate of growth has been accompanied by a corresponding stifling, warping, or even destruction of its sociological and moral elements, or of a country where these benefits accrue only to a few.

This is even more dangerous in our developing countries where after we take over from the colonial powers we simply want to put up more bricks on the foundations that they left. It will be of paramount importance to ask ourselves whether the concepts and objectives of our former rulers were the same as those we want to build. It is only then that we can either continue to build or we will discover that the foundation is unsafe and we should start a completely new one. 'Ideas' about development carry more weight when they originate in a country so to borrow a phrase from Garfield: 'Ideas are the great warriors of the world, and a war that has no idea behind it is simply a brutality.' To this one might add 'Ideas about development that have no origin whatsoever in the people they are supposed to serve are also simply a brutality.' If ideas about development are foreign and strange they will never sink into the hearts and system of the people. In this case the 'idea' is the starting point and the country or nation is moulded to fit a pre-determined idea until its natural growth breaks the mould or the mould prevents natural growth. We have this problem from the west in many parts of Africa in as much as we were colonized countries, and even after independence it is still possible to be ideologically too dependent.

There no doubt exist equally striking instances from the East where under the guise of 'pure' or 'scientific' socialism proponents of the Marxist form of economic and social change propagate the wholesale adoption of such concepts in circumstances totally unfitted to receive them and, in this case as well, the end result is invariably a tragic failure. That is why today in the countries of the developing world you see a lot of turmoil and upheaval and in certain places such as Indonesia large scale violence. But in spite of this in the case of Indonesia, nothing has been achieved; for the local people things are now much worse than during the days of Sukarno. But for the external powers things are good.

The anomalous situation of false or borrowed development finds expression in various forms. Take the simple example where a developing country, heavily populated, allows heavy investment in capital-intensive forms of production. This is not only irrational in the sense that there is usually, insufficient trained manpower to handle technologically sophisticated machinery but it results in a heavy waste of a labour force usually lying idle. Politically it is also a most imprudent course since providing employment opportunities for the masses must be a major consideration. Capital-intensive production is also a misallocation of resources in a situation where capital is the scarcer factor and could be spread more widely if less capital and more labour were utilized. I am certain that if the origin of such ideas about development were in any way associated with the people they would have rejected them if only for the reason that they do not offer them any opportunities for employment.

The educational system is another important factor of development and yet one most liable to become a carbon copy of foreign ways. Somebody has described an ideal educational system as one which embodies both 'relevance' and 'excellence'. While in most educational institutions in developing countries the element of 'excellence' is prevalent, 'relevance' is often in very short supply; and yet a relevant educational system is cardinal to meaningful development. A constructive educational system should impart to its citizens first and foremost knowledge about things around them, from the geography, history and culture of the nation, and then, secondarily, the things that are of universal interest. Citizens must first be taught to be citizens of their own country; to master their own environment; to appreciate the precious and distinguishing characteristics of their country; to think about how to mould and develop themselves and their country along a rational path that is in keeping with the country's basic substructure and thus not forming a contradiction.

We should never try to strive for standards or excellence that will enslave us into copying all the time. Let us develop and evolve our own standards. To start with they are bound to be low. But however low they may be, as long as they reflect the true nature of our country they will be far more respected than the imitation. We must learn to accept the truth without fear that our standards are not those of Cambridge University, Moscow University or New York University because we are not English or Russians or Americans. The yardstick to measure such standards simply cannot be there. My child can never speak English or write English just like an Englishman. He is not English. If he did, it would be after many years in England copying English culture; in which case he will then be a black Englishman, and I shall hardly know him as my son. I have sometimes been amazed at the efforts we Africans have made to speak English like an Englishman, French like a Frenchman, American English like an American. We have our own national characteristics which

distinguish us just as they have theirs; let us develop ours and our own way of participating in the conversation of the world.

It would appear that if an educational system, even University education, has been rationally planned. most of the problems that now are said to call for foreign expertise could be handled by local people. A Faculty of Economics that has based its teachings of banking on the practical problems prevailing in the country is better fitted to examine and advise on banking than a university professor recruited from the University of Chicago or a banker from the Bank of England. Teachers and students who study and deal in local banking problems may not be best equipped with international theories about banking, but it would appear sound judgement to regard them as the best equipped to use banks wisely for the national purpose.

The students at University and other educational institutions must be allowed to handle tools of development sufficiently early if they are to gain confidence in themselves. The elements of risk and mistake are always there but they must be taken. By utilising and involving students in practical problems we are laying a foundation for a corps of competent personnel who will not forfeit their own experience in over-reliance on foreign expertise.

In the same way as it is important to build development on given and natural premises, it is equally important that the people involved in the effort of development should, by and large, be local people themselves. To mobilise and recruit foreign manpower to undertake development in a developing country, however relevant their work might appear, is equally false and must be avoided at all cost. The quality of performance by indigenous people may leave a lot to be desired but it reflects the genuine effort and enables that effort to grow.

There have been too many cases where governments have fallen into the habit of instituting commissions or study groups composed of foreign experts to study certain areas of development and recommend a course of action. In some African countries this practice has become the rule rather than the exception. It is nonetheless regrettable. Apart from the already stated weakness that the contribution made by the foreign experts to development may represent false steps forward, the practice has the danger that the expert is applying a theory he has acquired in training in a totally alien situation. Even granted that such an expert is sufficiently adaptable to quickly grasp his local environment, the practice denies local experts the opportunity to apply their own acquired knowlege, however limited, to problems of their own country's development. Once a country has got into this habit it can surely be seen that it becomes increasingly difficult to break away from it because as time goes on the country gets drunk with the foreign tonic or wine and loses confidence in its ability to handle its own problems.

To sum up the point again. As long as the original 'ideas' about development are not in one way or the other connected or originating from the indigenous people, however humble they may be, such development, like all foreign imports, will forever remain foreign to the people it is meant for. They will not be psychologically or emotionally attuned to it. Therefore such development, however sophisticated the plan, will be slow to implement because it will evoke no

enthusiasm in the people and will not be part of the forces that move them towards change.

There must be realism about resources, realism about manpower and realism of peoples' adaptability to change. Sometimes one can be either over-cautious, forgetting that victories belong to those who dare, or at times over-zealous. Both these two extremes result in dead ends and may have disastrous political consequences especially in our young developing nations. Too conservative a view of development leads to apathy among the people and apathy leads to actual repression and decline. It is possible to make a plan with lower targets than the people could achieve. Human beings, it is true, have been described as basically conservative but this conservatism is rooted in their desire to preserve what they have rather than a negative reaction to a force that aims at a change for the better.

The human instinct to preserve is not opposed to development and change as such. It merely reflects the need to retain in society the precious elements which have been handed down from generation to generation and which make one society different from another. Thus, too conservative a view will not only fail to supplement and speed up development but may even obstruct the in-built thrust towards a better life. When that happens the tendency is for people who constitute society to react negatively and at times violently against the powers that be.

At the other extreme is a development which may be correct in form and substance but is rather too ambitious. It may be over-zealous if the plan ignores the realities of manpower available and the level of technical know-how. It may be over-zealous if its financial outlay calls for more than what can actually be obtained or even over-zealous if the projected expenditure is more than what the economy as a whole is capable of absorbing. Sometimes the masses have been accused of being evolutionary rather than revolutionary, but in my view all human beings are revolutionary provided they are convinced that what they are going to get is something that they want.

As long as people know that change will be in their interest the speed of change can be as revolutionary as one may wish. New methods of organizing society to achieve rapid economic development are an essential element which should accompany any process of economic growth aimed at by any well-meaning government. It is these new methods of organizing the society towards change that will inevitably determine the speed at which change can be achieved. The development that is generated should not only increase productivity but must be satisfying to the masses at large. It should further be emphasized that no government, however able and well equipped, is capable of ordering a society in which the natural element of preservation has been destroyed. A total disruption of the foundations of social organization removes the natural harmony which provides any government with a natural supporting element for peace and order.

It is thus crucial for our newly emergent nations, in charting forms and courses of development, to strike the right balance in terms of time, space and form. Many of the hazards that we have witnessed in post-independent Africa have

resulted from failure on the part of the development planners to attain this critical equilibrium.

Take for example the planning and implementation of *Ujamaa Vijijini* in Tanzania. The concept of '*ujamaa*' is neither Marxist or Lockeian. It is neither Russian nor Chinese. It is neither European nor Asian. It is African, but above everything else, it is Tanzanian. Its origin is Tanzanian, its concept is Tanzanian, its flavour is Tanzanian and its expressions are Tanzanian. It reflects a Tanzanian inner, emotional and psychological feeling towards the general theory of socialism. It is humble in character, unassuming in nature and simple in style. All these characters reflect the simplicity and humbleness of our people. It has not room for anarchy as a prelude to a revolutionary change, nor does it use the ingredients of force among its methods. It simply calls for people to sit down together and discuss the best ways and means of achieving *Ujamaa* life and even the writings of our leader, Mwalimu Nyerere, have avoided the dogmatism of a codified doctrine. As the concept of *Ujamaa Vijijini* is very flexible it can be further developed and perfected in a Tanzanian style with the passage of time and the accumulation of experience and I have already pointed out that once a concept is indigenous and is in line with the emotional and psychological concepts of the people, the people receive it readily because they know and understand what it means and that they will benefit from it. They receive it with a revolutionary spirit. I am a Mugogo and I know how in the past the Wagogo have been described as conservative. So much so that some people would have sworn that short of force you could never change the life of Wagogo. It might have been further argued that it would have been even harder to change the Wagogo as they are semi-nomadic.

Yet the *Ujamaa* concept has now proved all these predictions wrong. The change that is now taking shape in the Dodoma Region of Tanzania is fantastic. It is even more fantastic when you think of the thousands of people it has involved and the speed at which it has been done. Surely this could not have been achieved were it not for the revolutionary spirit with which the peasants have received it. Hitherto many of our plans in the developing countries have lacked originality and their concepts are removed from the realities of the people. Hence large expenditures of money are used to explain the plan to the people because it was not their plan in the first place. It is a plan made by some third party of sophisticated bureaucrats. The only role of the people is to hear about it and become executioners of a concept in whose formation they have played no part. What also happened in Dodoma shows that this is not the best way to use our scarce resources. Experts can only be loaned for 2 to 3 years; normally they need only 3 to 6 months to familiarise with the situation and then get to work. In other words they are supposed to imbibe in 6 months the experiences of a local man's lifetime and to crown it all they have to give this a meaningful interpretation in a development plan for people they do not know and for their benefit. I want to emphasize this point again. Let us involve our young men in the processes of planning and implementation and stop perversely replacing this most precious natural resources.

Finally in the process of speeding up development I want to warn against

one error. The error is exaggeration. This is a very prevalent problem in the developing world. We are prone to too much exaggeration. We exaggerate very much the question of shortage of manpower, although a plan that calls for foreign experts and forgets the indigenous people must of necessity fail. We tend to exaggerate our poverty, our shortage of capital and our shortage of ready money. We exaggerate our needs. Last but by no means the least we exaggerate the anticipated results. We promise the people the moon so that when the work is said to have been done disappointed people feel that they are still in the same situation if not worse. We thus generate apathy instead of enthusiasm. We talk too much and do too little.

Already we have lost a lot of time in the process of speeding up development. The people's impatience can everywhere be seen. Unless we change our concepts of development and our methods of implementation we will continue to be poor if not poorer. We have a great responsibility.