

DEVELOPMENT

A BRIDGE WITH NO RIVER

A TALL FACADE WITH NO BUILDING

A SPRINKLER ON A PLASTIC LAWN

AN ESCALATOR TO NOWHERE

A HIGHWAY TO THE PLACES THE HIGHWAY DESTROYED

AN IMAGE ON TV OF A TV SHOWING ANOTHER

TV ON WHICH THERE IS YET ANOTHER TV

EDUARDO GALEANO



DEBATING DEVELOPMENT, UNDERDEVELOPMENT AND OVERDEVELOPMENT

The Oxford English Dictionary defines ‘development’ as ‘evolution or bringing out from a latent or elementary condition’, ‘growth and unfolding’, ‘gradual advancement through progressive stages’. According to the Collins Thesaurus, to develop is to ‘improve or to prosper’. For most of us, development is about change – change for the better and implicit in this understanding are the ideas of movement and process. According to Professor Lalage Bown, *‘if development is seen as a continuing process, then it follows that no person or group will reach the end state of being developed’*.

Today ‘development’ is most often associated with ‘international development’ and therefore refers to the development of people, economies, societies and whole countries or regions. In this context development is about growth and prosperity or indeed their opposites, poverty and decline.

We can therefore initially argue that development is about:

- Change for the better
- Continuing processes
- Collectivities of people
- Growth and prosperity
- Inter-relationships

In the recent history and debates about development, economic development has been the dominant theme or understanding, measured usually in crude terms of Gross National Product (GNP) per capita or more recently Gross national Income (GNI) per capita. Thus, according to the World Bank, the most ‘developed countries’ in 2007 included the United States (US\$45,850 per capita), Switzerland (US\$43,080) and Ireland (US\$37,040) and the most ‘underdeveloped’ countries included Burundi (US\$330), the Democratic Republic of Congo (US\$290) and Liberia (US\$290). However, this measure of development and underdevelopment has many problems, e.g., it measures averages and tells us nothing about the distribution of wealth; it equates economic development with human development; and only measures one key dimension of common sense ideas about what development is or should be.

In more recent years, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has redefined development to a more embracing term:

‘Human development is a process of enlarging people’s choices. In principle, these choices can be infinite and change over time. But at all levels of development, the three essential ones are for people to lead a long and healthy life, to acquire knowledge and to have access to resources needed for a decent standard of living. If these essential choices are not available, many other opportunities remain inaccessible.’

Each year the UNDP publishes its Human Development Report which includes a measure of human



development known as the Human Development Index (HDI). The HDI measures the three key areas outlined above – health (life expectancy in years), knowledge (literacy rates) and resources (purchasing power parity or GNI adjusted by relating it to purchasing power, e.g., taking taxes into account, etc.). On this basis, the most ‘developed’ countries in human development terms include Iceland (1st), Norway (2nd) and Australia (3rd), with Ireland ranking 5th and the UK 16th. The least developed in human development terms are Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso and Guinea-Bissau.

Other organisations have developed a range of other measures of development that focus on issues such as gender, freedom, environment, basic needs and equality/inequality. Their purpose is to highlight various other key facets of development and underdevelopment.

In her booklet ‘What do we mean by Development,’ which explores development, recent development theories and measures of development, Professor Lalage Bown describes the ‘basic ingredients’ as follows:

- Change for the better
- Continuing process
- Application to groups of people, usually nations
- Applicability to all countries
- Inter-connectedness
- Emphasis on its role in improving human lives
- Equality in distribution
- Participation in decision-making
- Growth and prosperity
- Chance to lead a long healthy life
- Chance to have access to knowledge

And, she adds ‘...a full understanding of development will include an understanding of:

- The nature of poverty and deprivation
- Gender inequality
- The role of civil society’

In stark contrast, many writers, analysts and commentators writing from a ‘Third Worldist’ perspective tend to concentrate not on definitions of development, but rather definitions and descriptions of underdevelopment – which they see as the predominant reality for the world’s poor. One such author is Uruguayan Eduardo Galeano in his book *The World Turned Upside Down* who argues:

‘Twin totalitarianisms plague the world: the dictatorships of consumer society and obligatory injustice.

... Whoever doesn’t have, isn’t. He who has no car or who doesn’t wear designer shoes or imported perfume is only pretending to exist. Importer economy, imposter culture: we are all obliged to take the consumer’s cruise across the swirling waters of the market. Most of the passengers are swept overboard, but thanks to foreign debt the fares of those who make it are billed to us all. Loans allow the consuming minority to load themselves up with useless new things, and before everyone’s eyes the media transform into genuine needs the artificial demands the North of the world ceaselessly invents and successfully projects onto the South.

... ‘Developing countries’ is the name that experts use to designate countries trampled by someone else’s development...’

Those concerned particularly about the environmental impact of dominant models of development have begun

to use the term 'affluenza' to describe the current characteristics of western development. Their argument is that the West has become 'overdeveloped,' with hugely negative consequences for the planet and they point out that should the 'Developing World' emulate western models of consumption and resource use, the results for the planet would be disastrous.

One group of anti-consumerism commentators describe affluenza as '*a painful, contagious, socially transmitted condition of overload, debt, anxiety and waste resulting from the dogged pursuit of more*' (de Graaf, Wann and Naylor, 1996). The US TV channel PBS has described the condition in the following terms '*...the bloated, sluggish and unfulfilled feeling that results from efforts to keep up with the Joneses*' or '*...an epidemic of stress, overwork, waste and indebtedness caused by the pursuit of the American Dream*' or '*...an unsustainable addiction to economic growth.*'

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FURTHER INFORMATION

Although a great deal of prominence is given to developed world authors writing about development, the opinions of writers within the developing world itself are often overlooked.

Eduardo Galeano is mentioned in the above notes – much of his writing concerns the inequality and injustice of what he calls the 'looking-glass world'. Paulo Freire's classic text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000, Continuum) is a must-read for those interested in exploring the relationship between education, development and political consciousness.

Arundhati Roy's collection of essays *An Ordinary Person's Guide To Empire* (2004, South End Press) is a harsh critique of western democracies and their ideological drive to power and wealth at the expense of the world's poorest.

Vijay Prashad's book *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (2008, New England Press) chronicles the history of the Third World intellectual thought and its political and economic (under) development in exhaustive detail.