

A Critical Aspect of the Development Process

by

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February 9, 2010 - Experience of the development process exposes a critical factor that neither the richer nations, who, ostensibly, want to help developing countries (and the poor in their own societies), nor the developing countries themselves, have fully grasped. That factor is a development ethic. This, I believe, accounts for our unsuccessful efforts at economic development in the Third World, and our persistent poverty. The simple role of land, labor and capital is inadequate and overplayed.

It is generally agreed that developing countries need to develop their own traditional and non-traditional resources - particularly human (through a top-notch educational system, as per Germany, Japan, Singapore, etc), to exploit IT through education (that is beginning to happen in countries like E. Europe, India and Philippines), expanding their tourist sector, vastly increasing their agricultural productivity, among other initiatives. And doing this by utilizing their unique resources, whatever they are, to exploit comparative advantage, e.g. in Dominica, its deep coastal waters teeming with valuable fish, its unique Boiling Lake (the largest in the Western Hemisphere), its distinctive island tropical flora and fauna, and its proximity to large markets for special products and services.

But to foster economic development successfully and dynamically (i.e. over the long haul), there is one component that is generally omitted. Very instructive here is the experiences of N. America, N. Europe, Australia, Japan, and Singapore, for example. They all share a common set of development ethics that characterize the majority of their populations, not just a small set or few families. These ethics are the dynamic, psychological core of the development process, without which development is static, halting and slow overall.

Briefly, this ethic consists of a fundamental set of values -- a reverence for wisdom and learning; a belief in hard work; the sanctity of a calling or specialization; the importance of saving and investment (thrift and delayed gratification); a sense of community (contribution and giving back); and a guiding conscience that goes with one everywhere (that dictates honesty and civility without being told; and goes beyond "it takes a village"). See for example, Weber - The Protestant Ethic, Confucius - Analects, Brookhiser - The Way of the WASP, Vogel - Four Little Tigers, Reich -

The Work of Nations. And then for post-colonial societies in particular, one more ethos - the recognition that the community or the nation solves its own problems.

This ethic is that distilled from and imbued by either classical Protestant Ethics (taught as religious and civic dogma), or the similar Confucian Ethics (taught as community tradition). Though today's more secular world may not call them Protestant or Confucian, it is from these common, core ethics that the current dynamism of these developed countries primarily originate. The dynamism of these countries is not due to any abundance of natural resources. No doubt this helps; but it is from the ethos of the people, as is clear in resource-poor Japan and Singapore, that dynamic development flows.

Further, it must be emphasized that it is not enough for a few people in the society to be imbued with these values. All the people, or at least the great majority of them, must share this development ethos. On this issue, the people as a whole must all be marching to the same drummer. For example, you can't have some working hard while the majority laugh and say only slaves work like that; or some become wealthy by illegal or devious means while the majority remain poor despite hard work; or a few are thrifty and save while the majority denigrate thriftiness and praise conspicuous consumption; or some study diligently to improve their lot and the majority thinks that that is the hallmark of a decrepit bourgeois mentality; or a few in the neighborhood will cut the grass adjacent to their homes while the majority wait for government to do it. These pre-industrial or colonial mentalities and values must give way to development ethics.

It is this development ethic with which Third World countries have to imbue their people, to lift them out of their colonial and pre-industrial attitudes; and in so-doing, lift them and their societies out of poverty, helping resolve some of our more egregious problems - unemployment, low incomes and migration. These countries have to re-educate their people the same way that migrants from these same countries to the metropolitan countries acquire this ethic - quickly, shamelessly, without guilt and without apologies. And they have to do this through the schools and the churches, and through the training programs of government and business. Developing countries must embark on this process of re-education even as they secure short-term growth and development for their people. But dynamic, self-sustaining growth and development will come only from this re-education in development ethics. Otherwise, sustained, dynamic development will forever elude us.

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