

Development Practice: Looking through the Lens of Theory

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1. Introduction

The concept of development is social in nature since human beings and society are intrinsic to it. As a theoretical concept development had emerged with the expansion of economy in Europe and North America in the early nineteenth century and had gradually spread worldwide. This happened for academic causes as well as because of practical necessities of the governments, policy makers and leaders. This paper explores how the concept has become profoundly significant in social science disciplines since 1940s. This paper consists of two sections. The theoretical preposition of 'social science' and the understanding of 'development' in light of that have been discussed in the first section. A discussion on the practice and professional engagement of social scientists in development process has been presented in the second section, and a conclusion has been drawn based on the explanation provided in the paper.

2. Social Science Theory and Development

The journey of social science had begun in the Greek Philosophy and advanced through rationalism¹ (Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz); empiricism² (Lock, Berkeley, Hume); German classical philosophy (Kant, Hegel, Feuerbach). Max Weber (in 19th century), Frege, Wittgenstein, and many others also contributed in the later years.

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Therefore, epistemologically Hegel grounded root of the term 'social' in early 19th century. August Comte had further theorized 'social' as a theoretical concept in his work³ to put social science on the equal footing of natural science by proposing the end of metaphysics and adoption of empiricism.

The culminate stage of social science and sociology, in particular ought to be attached to Emile Durkheim who is one of the founders of sociology as an independent discipline. Before Durkheim, Karl Marx, Fredrick Engels and Max Weber had strengthened social science both theoretically and methodologically. For Max Weber, social science has not been confined within social but expanded by philosophy, political economy, and historicism of human life process⁴. This had been the period of overlap of multiple disciplines combined to form social sciences. To be more precise, in the Wealth of Nations⁵, Adam Smith (1776) had addressed the issue of capitalism. Marx had adopted political economy. Therefore, the trajectory of social science goes back not only to the deep of history but also to the process of assimilation of diverse disciplines that now are known as social sciences.

This paper is not focusing on all the fields of social sciences, but taking the term 'social science' to refer to the episteme of social, economic, political and cultural processes that have significance in understanding the concept of 'development' as it has been formulated by economics. In the contemporary phase, the term is more understood as discursive formation as it has been theorized by post-modernists - especially formulated following the theories of Michel Foucault.

Further, this article recognizes that the ideas of early anthropologists are important in understanding the later formulation of development theories. Particularly Morgan, Tylor, Frazer, Bachofen, Maine are important as all of them had been unilineal evolutionist.

Marxist paradigm has dealt with social process through the concept of historical materialism, dialectics, political economy with concept of labor, value, labor power, and surplus labor to reveal

the underlying causes of exploitation in capitalist system. However, the contribution of the neo-Marxists, (especially, Godelier, Meillassoux, Bloch) are to be seen in the application of Marxist paradigm on new ethnographic materials. They have helped overcome the theoretical orthodoxy of Marxist notions regarding infrastructure and superstructure. As of Godelier⁶, kinship, religion or a citizenship can assume the role of relations of production which has a three fold functions: access to the means of production, organization and distribution of labor, and distribution of products. Therefore, as kinship can assume such a role, Marx is reinvented through this theory. This has a direct relation to the development in general while concept is more inclined to both substantivist and classical theories of development as Marx profoundly dealt with capitalism and extended his methodology for transition from capitalism to socialism. This writing has not perused these relations as this has not been the focus.

Gardner and Lewis, in their book 'Anthropology, Development and the Post-modern Challenge' (1996) have given a significant analysis of development from historical to post-modern phase. The writing has undertaken development through the trajectory both as a concept and discourse. The concept of development is used widely all over the globe and is not founded by a single author but as a paradigm as it is done by a large number of scholars of diverse discipline of social science and beyond. Among those who are to be mentioned Escobar, Ferguson, Rahnema, Esteva, Grillo, had not only contributed in its episteme, but in application as well.

Development could easily be understood as a social construct in a particular social context. Social scientists face a difficult tenure to measure it within any particular framework or under any fixed indices. It is conceptualized as a form of knowledge based on western scientific understandings. The local knowledge has been defined as indigenous. Different meanings and their implication by different actors create different forms and types of knowledge. New concepts and vocabularies are added, such as; human development, social development, and cultural development, even

underdeveloped, less developed, poorly developed, and least developed.

The concept of development bears some activities participated by the general people where measurement and strategies would be taken on the basis of participatory outcome. Thus, this is somehow involves 'public social events' and 'domain of power and authority' (Moose 1997:276). This domain of power works within the local setting and includes rank, status and social stratification of the local inhabitants among themselves according to their culture, tradition and history.

Economic development is considered as investment-led development as well, which is based on a belief to create a better understanding among rich and poor in society where wealthy segment of population assume the role of investor and poor as producers. It is assumed that the maximum output could be gained from this type of investment-led projects, as patronization of the wealthy section would reinforce development. The economist emphasizes on strengthening poor's hand with wealthy people's investment. This leads to a discourse of development to a new dimension. The poor cannot take any initiative at large scale; instead, they can participate in projects where the resources are mobilized from the wealthy segment of society. Poor are assumed to be empowered, however; on the ground, it is assumed that they remain dependent on patron as they find that they do not have access to and control over resources which make them feel that they are not in the process of development. Thus, the central focus of the poverty alleviation has been primarily income generating strategies where individuals' potentialities receive priority. Many experts define it as 'bottom-up' innovation and incorporation of indigenous knowledge (Gardner 1997:143).

The economists treat development as a smooth acceleration of the economy with possible solution of problem of resources. The bureaucracy treats it as managerial and financial planning of the state with limited resources fulfilling unlimited demand. It implies that development could be thought of as a link between the people

and their satisfaction over the utilization and access to the resources and work. However, this idea does not confine within the resources as power involves in the process. It generates competition for resources and access to it.

3. Development and the Involvement of Social Scientists in the Process

This section presents the practice and professional engagement of social scientists in development process since the post World War II period. Scholars of social sciences are conducting both academic and applied research that help conceptualization of the meaning of development and factors that are contributing to it. They also get directly involved with projects⁷ and do advocacy for development. They work in interdisciplinary teams in both basic and applied research. They have experience to go to the people and are able to reveal conception, initiatives, and views of community members and are able to facilitate community decision-making process from viewpoint of the inhabitants (Cerneja 1991; Booth 1994; Rahnema 1995). This perspective basically focuses up on the developing countries. Inhabitants of these countries are viewed through the eyes of the scholars of developed countries. Two distinctive trends could be identified; emphasizing socio-economic factors in one hand and cultural, environmental and local knowledge on the other (Croll and Parkin 1992; Escobar 1995; Hobart, 1993). 'People participation' received major attention throughout the time. Three decades earlier, the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) appeared in development process. They enacted themselves with the new idea, focused on the poor and intended to facilitate change through direct participation of beneficiaries (poor), and had begun to work with their own conception about development and system that innovated by them to facilitate the development as agents.

Earlier, the activities of the non-governmental organizations were based on local resources. Later, this scope encountered by scarcity of resources. The organizations looked for external resource mobilization. In this context, a relationship had been established among internal and external factors, which resulted in having a

donor-recipient relationship in development. Hussain (2001) found that there exist close link among the local and external resources and their relationship. This external linkage enhanced the local initiatives for making the resources economically significant on the one hand and led to develop as a competitive production system among them, on the other. The idea about resource changed social, political, cultural, ecosystemic nature inclusive status, and stratification, even the demographic features of the society.

Many countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America became independent before and soon after the World War II. Before independence, these countries had been under the colonial rule, and so planning of projects used to be formulated, designed and implemented by the colonial administrators. Local authorities, politicians, scholars did not have any role in these processes. After independence, major responsibilities had to be carried out by countries that had inadequate experience in policy formulation and project implementation which gradually led those nations to be dependent on former colonial rulers again. The process encompasses the global system together through the states. The relationship among the colonial rulers and their former colonies of newly independent states still exists. Now, development concept is far distant from its earlier meaning. In a simple way, it could be noted that development intervention is open for cooperation and understanding among the rich and poor countries in the world. The people of rich and poor countries have access to know each other. But reality is not as simple as it seems to be.

The target and planning for development have been changed as collapse of cold war had facilitated emergence of new liberal economy. Donors are assessing the policies and priorities of the nation states and compare with their own projection and policies. The experts are producing prescription for a particular country. They are also learning about the societies for intervention. It seems that planners and policy makers know that 'people', 'poor', 'natives', are unrepresented in the development initiatives, it's planning and designing. Their opinion needs to be taken into consideration.

The discourse on community participation creates an image of 'development from below' in social, economic and cultural arrangements (Dahl and Rabo 1992, Moran 1996, Bennett 1996, Smith 1996 and Horowitz 1996). The question is the extent to which development would work in the context of market-led or open economy. The new discourses are enhanced by new lexicons to reinforce different aspects of development with diverse meanings. Experts from various disciplines with their own intellectual traditions explain the focal point of development from their training and institutional position. These aspects and meanings are interrelated. Again, development process includes a set of relationship between groups such as North-South, East-West, First world-Third world, developed and developing nations, colonial rulers-colonies, donors-recipients. The composition of groups is not homogenous. There are different categories in the North in one hand and in the developing nations on the other. Thus, there is bleak chance to have unique action from one group. At the same time similar action could not be expected from the parallel forces such as North, First world, developed countries, donors. How groups are able to create a successful relationship with each other is crucial for both parties. In this sense, development is likely to be understood in a corroborative manner on a common platform.

Development experts emphasize on the people in various ways such as 'Putting People First' (Cerne 1991) or 'Putting the Last First' (Chambers 1983). It involves two groups directly: developers and undeveloped. The larger banner of the developers includes varieties of interest groups, the policy makers, planners, experts, technically skilled persons, activist and workers at the field level. The undeveloped refers to people who are not developing consistently. In some cases, they may be exploited. There are many institution and organizations that are engaged in designing, implementing and operating plans to develop them. Government stands above the development agents. Donor involvement is seen parallel to the government. The relationship between these groups is not similar in all the cases. A successful

way could be dialogue-based activities, while imposition of the plans would be unsuccessful.

Further, the process depends on the varieties of aid factors: technical knowledge, skilled experts' assistance, monetary aid and technological aid. Key question is: how an outside expert is able to develop a proper plan for a society which is significantly different from the individual planner. The involvement of local and international skilled hands is truly useful to development planning. Earlier, international experts were taking responsibilities to produce appropriate plan for local needs and improvement. Till the end of cold war it continued and finally donors, government and experts understood the constraints of their expertise. Rather, civil society came to ground to protest aimless activities. A group of professionals having background of social science and consultants are working for the planning to ensure its applicability and reduce the uncertainties of failure.

4. Conclusion

Social sciences provide newer perspectives in understanding or conceptualizing development. It highlights on social, political, economic and cultural processes as well as on gender dimensions. There have been many theories and paradigms in social science that deal with the issues involved in the development process.

This paper has been a very limited attempt to show that there has been a gap between the understanding of planners and locals. The ways the governments, donors, scholars and agencies address it differs from each other. The concept of development itself has been conceived in diverse ways and in recent decades it as appeared more as a dominant discourse. These differences in understanding the concept and its application need to be explored. Social scientists can reduce this gap through further examination of the relevant issues. Deeper understandings would thus be generated by different disciplines of social sciences which would make contribution in making development free from its current problems.

Notes:

¹ Rationalism is usually associated with the introduction of mathematical methods in philosophy. The writings of R. Descartes are *The Rules of the Direction of the Mind* (1628), *The World* (1633), *The Discourse on the Method* (1637), *The Principle of Philosophy* (1644), of B. Spinoza are *On the Improvement of the Understanding* (1662) and *The Ethics* (1677) and of G. Leibniz is *New Essays of Human Understandings* (1765) famous in this regards. Please see web address: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rationalism>

² Empiricism is theory of knowledge which usually emphasizes the aspects of scientific knowledge that are closely related to the experiences and dependent on evidence that is observable by the senses. Philosophers who are commonly associated with empiricism are Francis Bacon, John Locke, John S. Mill, George Berkeley, David Hume, and others

³ A. Comte, *Course of Positive Philosophy* (1930)

⁴ Weber, M., 1949 (1904), *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, Glencoe: Free Press

⁵ Smith, A., *An Enquiry into the nature of the Wealth of Nations*, 1776, Edwin Cannan Ed., Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press

⁶ Maurice Godelier, *The Mental and the Material. Thought, economy and society*, Verso, 1986

⁷ The concept of 'project' is intrinsic to development which refers to intervention that uses human skill, existing technical knowledge and resources to expand the economy. Projects create dynamism in the community. Each project has a particular target to bring change in local community and influence to accept the change. Thus, community participation is also a part of development process inclusive design, agenda and execution. On the ground, particularly at the operational level of a project, the organization and the agencies often unable to meet the need of people who are supposed to be the beneficiaries. In general, they operate as of the need of the project as the agencies find it even if welfare of the beneficiaries is ignored.

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