



Reimagining Development?

The Dispossessed, Discontented, and Dreamers of Development

A Forum to Exchange Ideas

December 11 – 12, Colombo Sri Lanka

During the past 100 years, the world has changed rapidly. There has been an exponential growth, both in terms of population and economies; while population has increased from 1.6 billion people to over 7 billion, the value of the global product has increased by close to 50 times since the 1900s to over US\$60 trillion¹. Much has also been achieved in terms of improved quality of life around the world. Since the 1970s, average global income has more than doubled and the range, amount and quality of goods and services available to people today is unprecedented. Life expectancy has increased, sometimes substantially, and people around the world have much higher levels of education than ever before. Looking back over the past 40 years, the Human Development Report of 2010 concludes that there has been impressive progress around the world².

Increasingly, however, there are signs of tensions and underlying systemic problems with our current models of development. The world economic systems are showing substantially greater propensity to crisis; from the recent food, fuel and financial crises to climate change debates, some commentators are suggesting that uncertainty and volatility has become ‘the new normal’³. These events are a stress test of current development paradigms and have led many to question our core ideas about what development is and how it happens. At the heart of this debate is the unresolved tension between material progress on the one hand, and the understanding of what constitutes human wellbeing on the other.

In this context, a ‘reimagining’ of development – what it is as well as how we get there – may be opportune. CEPA’s 11th Annual Symposium on Poverty focuses on the theme of reimagining development and hopes to provide a forum to share thinking as well as stimulate new thinking about what the goal of development is or should be, and consequently the process of reaching it. In reimagining development, the discussions will be based around three clusters of people and thought – the dispossessed, the discontented, and finally, the dreamers.

¹World Bank. 2008 *Global Purchasing Power Parities and Real Expenditures*, 2005 International Comparison Program, World Bank, Washington D.C.

²United Nations Development Programme. 2011 *Human Development Report 2010 – 20th Anniversary Edition: The Real Wealth of Nations: Pathways to Human Development*, United Nations, New York.

³Kanbur quoted in Haddad, L., Hossain H., McGregor, J.A. and Mehta, L. 2011. Introduction, Time to Reimagine Development? *IDS Bulletin*, Oxford, 42(5):1-12.



The Dispossessed

“Poverty is an injustice that must be overcome”

- Centre for Poverty Analysis

One of the most disappointing aspects of the current development paradigm is the number and scale of those dispossessed, excluded and left behind by development. According to the World Bank, there are, still, 1.4 billion people living in poverty or living on less than US\$1.25 per day⁴. The FAO estimates that the number of hungry people worldwide is 963 million or 14% of the world population. The UNICEF estimates that poverty claims the lives of 25,000 children a day, while many live their lives out in drudgery and social exclusion. About 27-28% of all children in developing countries are estimated to be underweight or stunted. Inequality is on the rise worldwide, both nationally and internationally. The poorest 40% of the world's population account for only 5% of global income. On the other hand, the richest 20% account for 75% of world income.

Many ideas have been put forward to explain why this is so. For some, this is an inevitable and acceptable side effect of development, which will disappear as higher and higher levels of material progress is achieved. Others may also see it as a side effect but something that may be addressed within the current paradigms, such as through the rights discourse, the capabilities approach and so on. Yet others see it as a structural aspect of development, for example those who argue that poverty is structural injustice. This conference focus will provide a space to engage with these ideas, including the progress as well as challenges facing these ideas and initiatives.



The Discontented

‘ The continued pursuit of economic growth... does not appear to advance and may even impede human happiness.’

- UK Sustainable Development Commission

During the past 60 years, development discourse has increasingly become dominated by the field of economics which has reached hegemonic status. In particular, neoliberal thought which emphasises market-led development, competition and profit orientation, individualism, productivity and efficiency etc., enjoy a high level of acceptance among policy makers. Even in countries which are supposedly committed to socialist ideals such as Sri Lanka, higher income or consumption is equated with higher wellbeing. As a

⁴ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2011, *Rethinking Poverty*, Report on the World Social Situation 2010, United Nations, New York.

result, the sustainable development commission report notes that, ‘for the last five decades, the pursuit of (economic) growth has been the single most important policy goal across the world’⁵.

These weaknesses in the growth-led development paradigm have given rise to much critique. The most prominent among these is the environmentalist critique, where infinite growth in production of goods and services is pitted against the finite resources on this planet. Environmental inputs into production mostly pertain to public goods, sometimes even at a global level such as the climate. But the use and pollution of these public goods are often not taken into account in growth-led development policies. In fact, such production-oriented thinking can provide incentives to degrade the environment. An economic growth-lead paradigm also prioritises the ‘now’ over the future, leading to unsustainable consumption which is detrimental to the wellbeing of future generations. This conference focus will provide a space to engage with these ideas which critically analyse the dominant development paradigm, specifically the primacy of growth, market-lead development strategies and other aspects of dominant economic thought about the end and means of development.



The Dreamers

“The idea that to make a man work you've got to hold gold in front of his eyes is a growth, not an axiom. We've done that for so long that we've forgotten there's any other way.”

- F. Scott Fitzgerald

While there are many who would argue that the development discourse is overwhelmed by a single dominant paradigm, there are many who manage to think, write and live an alternative paradigm. These ‘dreamers’ are social scientists and other academics, or they are artists, poets and playwrights, or they are entrepreneurs or individuals. They are in the south as well as the global north. New alternative thought may relate to ideas such as limits to growth, limits to consumption, sufficiency economics and so on. These ideas may challenge the existing orthodoxy by providing alternative ways in which we can think about the world. During the conference, we hope to draw on these ideas in both mainstream and alternative media. In addition, further conversations will be encouraged through pre-conference activities such as film festivals and other workshops held outside the conference space.

Conference Structure

The Symposium is structured to provide a space for a meeting of minds, where researchers and practitioners, academics and artists and north and south may interact across age, gender, discipline and language barriers to share ideas about their visions of development. To facilitate this, the Symposium will

⁵ Jackson, T. 2009. *Prosperity Without Growth? The transition to a sustainable economy*, Sustainable Development Commission, London.

be held over two days, from December 11-12, 2012 with parallel sessions to facilitate small group, interactive discussions.

CEPA invites contributions to the Forum in the form of papers, panels, round-tables and other forms of alternative media. If you are interested in contributing to this Forum, please write to us by July 30, 2012.

For further information, please contact:

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