

Extract from

## **The Development of Capacity**

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*"I remembered one morning when I discovered a cocoon in the bark of a tree, just as the butterfly was making a hole in its case and preparing to come out. I waited a while, but it was too long appearing and I was impatient. I bent over it and breathed on it to warm it. I warmed it as quickly as I could and the miracle began to happen before my eyes, faster than life. The case opened, the butterfly started slowly crawling out and I shall never forget my horror when I saw how its wings were folded back and crumpled; the wretched butterfly tried with its whole trembling body to unfold them. Bending over it, I tried to help it with my breath. In vain. It needed to be hatched out patiently and the unfolding of the wings should be a gradual process in the sun. Now it was too late. My breath had forced the butterfly to appear, all crumpled, before its time. It struggled desperately and, a few seconds later, died in the palm of my hand."*

Nikos Kazantzakis  
Zorba the Greek

## THESIS

*"Development, as in Third World Development, is a debauched word, a whore of a word. Its users can't look you in the eye."*

Leonard Frank

*We have met with them all, up and down the line, and we know that their story, in spite of its collaborative cohesion, is literally unreal; but there is no gap through which we may penetrate the madness. They all appear utterly convinced, their statements reverberating off each other as if we are all caught in a gigantic echo-chamber. Together, they represent the whole chain - from the local NGO responsible for the project, to the expatriate technical advisors and the national governments departmental officials and extension officers, through to the foreign donors and their own governmental backers. For all of them this project is almost a talisman, a repository of meaning and purpose, a self-evident truth. Their easy belief causes us to doubt our own questions, their purpose and their efficacy. But we have been there, and we cannot doubt what we have seen. Or not seen.*

*Not that we can claim to have really spoken with the people, with the community for whom the project has supposedly been created; we do not speak their language, and our conversations have been frustrated and sullied through broken English and mediocre translation. Also, we come from such different worlds - we from a South African city, they from deep in the African bush. But we do have a limited ability to cross those borders; it is our work, after all, and we take it seriously. So we can at least identify their bemused confusion, their lack of interest, at this strange development project in the bush, even though it is tempered by generosity of spirit towards those who have come to help them, and by the inevitable glimmerings of avaricious desire at the prospect of the resources which may offset their very real struggle for survival.*

*We have just completed an evaluation of a rural development NGO, and have submitted our report. The impact of the report hinged on the exposure of the flagship project of the NGO - a cooperative farming venture situated some kilometres from a tribal village which traditionally practised subsistence agriculture from individual homesteads. The evaluation report was, we thought, an attempt to report as honestly as possible. It had not been appreciated. We sat now with a sullen and angry group, representatives of the NGO, of the donors, of government. All were equally distressed. All were at pains to have us retract, or at least amend, our report.*

*We cannot allow this report to be circulated in Europe, rumbled the donors, we have raised millions on the basis of this project. And we, murmured the NGO, have been doing the best we can; you indicate now that we do not know what we are doing. And the government representatives bleated as if they were lambs being taken to the*

*slaughter - would you destroy our attempts to modernise our people and our economy, they demanded?*

*Look, we replied, an evaluation is not a judgement, its a tool with which to learn. There is much that can be done, but not the way you're going about it. Assist the people to increase the yields from their homestead gardens, and build slowly from there. But what you have done strikes us as somewhat absurd. The thing is, none of the villagers asked you to do what you have done. They wanted help simply with increasing their yield. But this was not enough for you. So now, deep in the bush, unconnected by road to any source of supply or marketing outlet, one and a half hours walk from the nearest village, a 30 hectare plot of cleared ground stands fenced and empty. You have put down two bore holes, and this together with the fencing and some unused machinery lying about has cost you 50,000 dollars.*

*You have provided the cooperative with two weeks training. When we visited the project, at 11:00 in the morning, no-one was working on the plot; actually, no-one was there at all. The two cooperative members who accompanied us- one of whom is the chairperson - appeared to understand nothing about cooperatives, economic agriculture, or the project as an entity. No-one is taking responsibility for, or displaying any commitment towards, their cooperative. One of the members stated that unless some form of salary was forthcoming soon, from the NGO, he would leave. Apart from calling in question the very concept of cooperative, this clearly, at best, is a long term venture which will only realise profit some years down the line. He wants a job; other villages simply want to continue farming as they have in the past, although better. There is, we put to the circle of staring faces, simply nothing there to speak of, apart from the ruins of your own activities.*

*But don't you see, they responded, we need a project of this kind to change a way of life which is going nowhere.*

*We sat back and looked at them. Yes, we were thinking, clearly this is their need, but what does it have to do with the reality of the community? At the same time, we realised that we were falling into the same trap which had snared them. They were our clients, and they had not asked for an opportunity to learn. They had asked for an evaluation report which they could use to raise further funds. We could not alter the report, but we saw that it had indeed become simply a judgement, not a developmental tool. The circle had not been broken; it had simply wound in upon itself, and become stuck in its own grooves.*

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For many, many years now, for longer than many of us have been around, the concept of development has been with us. At least, development as it is generally understood: as a political-economic project which is intended to assist under-developed communities and

countries to become developed, in the sense of catching-up with developed countries. Development has thus been understood largely from an economic perspective - as the eradication, or at least the reduction, of poverty (and therefore, concomitantly, development has implied the building of - or entry into - a modern economy). More recently it has also gained a political overtone - developed is often synonymous with democracy, pluralism, justice, equity and respect for a universal code of human rights. (Moreover, it also often promotes a normative stance - for instance, the promotion of gender awareness as an intervention into traditional culture.) When coupled with each other, the political economy perspective attains a social dimension: in some form or other development has implied modernisation - the transformation of traditional society (characterised by dependence on particular social forms and cultures, as well as on the whims and dictates of nature) towards modern society (characterised by control over nature, by individual free choice, and by independence as freedom from given social and natural reality).

This is a radically simplistic rendition of a highly complex concept, particularly today, when much that has passed for development lore has become contested and contentious. We are living in what is often described as a post-modern era, in which ambiguity, uncertainty and contradiction have replaced former certainties. Many feel that the development project has failed; the gap between rich and poor has increased rather than decreased, and ecological and social problems begin to render our world, in a very real sense, unsustainable. Development theory has undergone many transformations over the years, and today there is a growing body of thought which is beginning to question not simply the various theories but the very validity of the development concept itself. And further, not simply the concept, but the integrity and intentions of those who presume to practise and promote development.

Questions abound, but the mainstream of development practice, polluted though it may be, continues on its inexorable path to the sea. There is little change. For underlying the various theories of development which inform practice, there are certain paradigmatic assumptions which are largely unconscious, and to that extent hold practitioners captive. We will attempt here to describe these assumptions and practices. Readers may resist recognising the operation of some or all of these assumptions in their practice, and they may in part be right - yet all of us have had our sensibilities marked by these assumptions. They may not describe what we all think - development theory no longer conforms to this simplistic modernist paradigm - but despite the new perspectives which are becoming available, what follows does to a large extent describe what we all do. In the following article we will contrast these with another possible set of assumptions, which may take us some way towards the transformation of practice.

The dominant development paradigm is then, by and large, made up of the following assumptions and practices:

- Development can be created and engineered. Indeed, it must be. It does not exist in and of itself. Interventions,

projects, are designed specifically to bring development to those amongst whom it is lacking.

- Development, then, is something which is brought, to and for some, by others who presumably are more developed.
- Development is done on behalf of third parties. In other words, the development practitioner brings development interventions which are designed and financed by third parties, not by the communities and clients who are the subjects of the intervention.
- All of the above constrains the development practitioner to work primarily out of the specifications of the world from which he/she has been sent, rather than out of an accurate and sensitive reading of the particular situation with which he/she is actually faced.
- Development is linear and predictable. Put another way, there is a direct line between cause and effect, between input and output. So long as we have made the correct assumptions initially we should be able to predict output based on input.
- This gives rise to the concept of the development project which is generally short term, time-bound, limited in terms of resources and both limited and finite (predictable) in terms of output. The development project, which is the primary vehicle for development intervention and finance, presumes these assumptions to be true. Development can be said, in fact, to be defined and framed by the concept of the development project - development begins and ends where the particular project begins and ends. Development itself, then, has a beginning and an end; and the assumption is that the end can be defined and provided for at the beginning. (It is also remarkably difficult, in terms of donor demand, to change a project substantially once it has started, in response to what has been learned about strategy and methodology during the early implementation of the project. Despite the rhetoric, real learning is not high on the agenda).
- Development presumes a particular perspective on human nature - that understanding will generate change. (Hence the emphasis on training and technical assistance in development interventions). It does not take much account of unconscious factors, of processes of change, of culture, tradition, or the human heart.
- Concomitantly, development places far more emphasis on technical experts and advisors, and on trainers, than it does on change facilitators. This emphasis expresses itself in terms of project specifications, in terms of relative positioning within NGOs and in terms of remuneration.

- Development assumes a preferred culture or value system. This presumption is denied by most development pundits, yet it remains true. The presumption is that there is something wrong, and we intervene to change it. We judge the results according to our own norms.
- As an ironic addendum to the two preceding points, development practitioners are not required to pay attention to their own development as human beings, as part of effective development practice. The development practitioner's own development and processes of learning are entirely removed from the picture. There is thus little or no reciprocity in the relationship between developer and developpee.
- Development has come to accept that the subject's participation in the development project is vital, but it sees that participation as a means, not as an end in itself.
- Development assumes that a successful development intervention, or project, is replicable; indeed, this is one criterion in judging its success. If it is not replicable elsewhere, it is lacking in value.
- Likewise, the successful development project is sustainable, both in terms of financial resourcing as well as in terms of continuity of the effects achieved. If the effects of the intervention are not sustained, the project will be deemed to have been unsuccessful.
- The evaluation of development interventions - which tells us much about the underlying assumptions - is generally performed in terms of the ends stipulated in the project document, not in terms of the myriad other outcomes which may (or may not) have been forthcoming in terms of the individuals, communities or organisations with whom the development intervention had been entered into.

Generally, the underlying paradigm which characterises a conventional development approach is fundamentally about the **delivery of resources**. These resources come in various guises - they may be finances, equipment, technical know-how, skills, political clout, even a particular approach to life. The point is, those who are under-developed lack certain resources; development (at its best) entails the effort to transfer those resources from those who have to those who do not have.

## ANTITHESIS

*'... each person is a new marvel, a new mystery, a fully justified fact.  
... We stand before each other in awe and wonder.'*

## Bernard Lievegoed

*She spoke with animation, with an energy which might have been intoxicating were it not so rigorously grounded. A kind of rational passion infused her speech. She was the director of an NGO which had recently worked through an organisation development process with a consultant; she was being questioned as to the value of the intervention.*

*Look, I have just come back from a meeting with department officials, and for the first time I was able to hold my own with them, to resist intimidation, to resist their pressure, to stand my ground and to win significant concessions. You have to understand - they are all men, a whole roomful of them in their grey suits and dreary ties, smug in the righteousness of their bureaucratic power, disdainful of women, of NGOs, of the issues I was bringing. I never find it easy, facing that kind of situation alone, a stranger in a strange land. But today was different, I feel different, I am different, and I attribute a lot of that to the organisational intervention.*

*So how did this actually happen? She was anticipating our questions, and we decided to simply sit back and listen. Firstly you have to understand that she is a consultant who's been working with us for many years. She doesn't fulfil donor specifications - we're her client, and the understanding and contract lies between us, not with the donor. It is up to us to raise the money to pay her, so together we have some control over our relationship. This gives her a certain freedom, to work with the issues which arise as important when they arise, and not to have to fulfil the expectations of others. Apart from this, she's worked with us for some years now; she knows the organisation, she knows the developmental steps we have taken, she can read where we are now and can begin to anticipate where our next steps, our next leaps, perhaps, might lie. That's the right word, read, it's what she does in order to help us move further, but she always somehow reads aloud, in other words we're fully aware of her thinking as we go, and she of ours.*

*This time we had requested a conventional strategic planning session, an annual event for us. Now we're an organisation that has spent years developing and articulating our identity, our vision, our overall strategy and methodology. Yet during the first morning it became apparent that our main questions concerning the organisation centred on our inability to get in touch with these things, as a prelude to specific planning. We claimed not to know what they really were, what our essence was.*

*Because she knew us, she could not believe that this was the real issue. She took us through a series of processes which proved that we were very aware of the essential nature of our contribution. She then ventured the opinion that it was not our lack of awareness that was the problem but rather our insecurity, our lack of acknowledgement of ourselves and our contribution - that is, the fact that we were unable*

*to get in touch with our essence was the issue, not the lack of an essence itself.*

*So she took us through a series of exercises which enabled us to become conscious of that which was unconsciously holding us back. In the process, we got in touch with our shadow. It seems to work like this, that the very things we pride ourselves on, consciously, release opposite energies which we are not conscious of and which thereby achieve immense ability to constrain our efforts. In our case, we pride ourselves on being an open and flexible organisation, almost without boundaries, an organisation which listens and responds, rather than presumes and imposes, an organisation which attempts to work developmentally with whatever it finds, rather than from a set of its own prescriptions. A nurturing, facilitative organisation. In other words, an organisation which tries to build the power of others, rather than its own. This is our light. But the shadow which emerges and which seeks to gain dominance is then our own powerlessness, our inability to say no to the impossible number of requests that we get, our inability to hold our own in the face of the rigid certainties and expectations imposed upon us by those with whom we collaborate, by those whom we lobby and advocate towards. We become overwhelmed. And because so many others gain their power through rigidity and dogmatism, through seeking to impose their will on others, we lose a sense of our own power, of the value and importance of our essential responsiveness, of that which we bring. So we begin to feel insecure and shaky.*

*All this was painful to acknowledge, but it proved to be an unbelievably developmental step for us. Each of us individually, and the organisation as a whole, was able to make conscious our own contributions to this dilemma, and through this we were able to realise our own power. Not to change our essence in order to match the power of others, but to gain confidence and clarity about our essential contribution, and to work proactively out of that new sense of power. We were enabled to feel sure of ourselves; we were enabled to regain what we previously had, but which we had lost along the way, as our very success had taken us into new realms of work and relationship.*

*Having come so far, the rest of the strategic planning session followed its more usual course. But the value of the process lay in those initial stages, in the consultant's ability to read correctly the developmental stage that we were at, and to bring the processes which enabled us to transform, to move beyond. We were privileged to have a consultant who did not feel bound by any restrictions other than the needs of the development process itself, who felt free to venture in unusual directions. And for us, we have all grown immeasurably, and the organisation feels totally transformed, able once more to bring its light with clarity and purpose. More than this, we are able now to see the shadows which the light casts, we are able to catch ourselves when we lapse into powerlessness. We have become more aware of our own patterns, and are now able to exercise control, to take responsibility for our own future.*

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At the core of CDRA's understanding of the concept of development is the recognition that development is an innate and natural process found in all living things. It is important for us to understand that as development workers we do not bring or deliver development, but intervene into development processes which already exist. Whether the intervention is into the life of an individual, organisation or community it is critical to realise that the process of development is already well established and needs to be treated with respect. The most fundamental challenge facing the development practitioner is to understand the development process into which she or he is intervening. To know where the individual, the organisation or the community is located on its own path of development. To understand where it has come from, how it has changed along the way and what the next development challenge is likely to be. And to be able to read in this way, an openness is required, an ability to observe acutely and without preconception, but with a fine understanding of development processes, so that insight can be brought to observation. In short, a certain detachment is required, without pretending to supposedly scientific objectivity.

Equipped with this knowledge and understanding the practitioner can begin to assess how the resources that they bring will impact on the development process. Some of the most common examples of the consequences of the inappropriate introduction of resources are the increase of dysfunctional dependency on the provider of the resource, and the inappropriate use or abuse of the resources to the detriment of the recipient. Equally it is at times almost miraculous to experience the difference that an appropriate development intervention facilitated in a sensitive and responsive way can make to the genuine empowerment of the recipient. And this, surely, is the essence of a development intervention - the facilitation of growing awareness and consciousness such that people are able to take control of their own lives and circumstances, and exert responsibility and purpose with respect to their future. This inevitably implies also an activist stance; that is, assistance with confronting the manifestations and dynamics of power, however these may manifest. If a development intervention does not succeed in this, then it can hardly be said to have been developmental.

To locate the recipient of one's services on their own path of development, and understand the implications of the point it has reached, is obviously not a simple process of quantitative measurement. It demands a clear understanding of the development process itself, coupled with respect for the specific instance of such a process which one is actually facing. We cannot go into the details of such a framework for understanding in this report, but we will raise one or two aspects of our understanding, of our framework, in order to provide at least a sense of what we mean.

Thus, one aspect of our understanding of the process of development identifies three discernible phases of *ideal unimpeded* development which we apply to understand humans as well as the social systems they create. The first phase characterised by **dependence** is a period of great learning and skills acquisition in which others play a major role in providing the environment and resources required for growth. The

second phase of **independence** entails a fundamental change in relationship and a period of testing and personalising capacities and competencies, using them to act and impact on the environment in ways that help establish the actor as unique and self-reliant. The third phase involves another fundamental change in relationships towards increasing **inter-dependence** - the actor now understands that the full realisation of own potential is achieved only through effective collaboration with others.

Many examples can be found to illustrate the application of this framework of understanding in trying to better apprehend development in different situations. In the human individual the three phases would correspond with childhood, adolescence through early adulthood, and mature adulthood. The pioneer, differentiated and integrated phases of development often referred to in organisation development theory can also be better understood when the phases are explored from the perspective of dependence, independence and interdependence. Even when looking at the fundamental relationship between humankind and nature (or the environment) over the ages the application of the framework adds insight. From dependence on nature, to the rational scientific phase characterised by attempts to gain control over nature and become independent of it, leading to the conscious rediscovery of environmental sustainability possibly heralding a developmental shift from independence towards interdependence.

It is critical that these phases are all recognised as developmental and one is not judged as being superior to any other. The full and positive experience of each phase provides learning and capabilities which are vital to the ability to engage in the next phase. Each phase is essential to the next and each subsequent phase carries within it the experiences of the phases which preceded it - it is not possible to skip phases. It is also necessary to recognise that these phases are continually recurring and overlapping in the course of the life of an individual, organisation or community - as one develops one encounters new areas in which these sequenced phases must be experienced afresh. Although skilled and sensitive interventions can help avoid and even remove hindrances and blockages to the process, development does have a pace of its own. There is an absolute limit to the extent to which it can be speeded up through the application of increased resources and developmental interventions.

Following on from the recursive nature of the development process, alluded to above, a further defining characteristic, one which sets development apart from quantitative growth, is its non-linear nature. Development does not constantly progress along a smooth incremental line; at critical points in the process there are periods of significant crisis and turmoil, periods when everything that has previously provided stability and meaning are questioned and challenged, periods when conflict is often symptomatic. These developmental crises serve a critical function in providing the impetus for letting go of the old in order to take on the new (another critical feature of the development process). Often the crises need to be of such gravity that those involved know that there is no option other

than to break the old forms in order to build the new. The seeds of crisis are sown in each phase of development and grow at their own pace as the process unfolds; the passing from one phase to another is prompted by their germination. To understand where an organisation has gotten to in its development, the development practitioner must read her or his client's needs deeply, and with respect - this goes way beyond the conventional practice of needs analysis, whether this be participatory or not.

There is a seeming contradiction in what has been written above. Development is non-linear, therefore unpredictable and even anarchic; at the same time, there appear to be natural phases, sequences and modalities which can be said to characterise the process as a particular pattern or arrangement. The contradiction is a real one, but rather than being the kind of contradiction which demands resolution, it can be seen as the beating heart of development itself, an irreducible tension which provides the energy to fuel the process. A constant interplay between order and chaos, between form and flow. Which is one of the primary characteristics - according to recent advances in thinking prompted by the new sciences - of all living systems.

It follows from all of this - which really provides just a taste of the dynamics of the development process, just the first hint of an appreciative framework for grasping it - it follows that development interventions are essentially about the development of people, and that development cannot be imposed. No actor will develop in a particular way just because someone has argued eloquently that they ought to do so. Ultimately, development is driven from within, so while a development worker must bring specialist knowledge and skill to an intervention, the final outcome of the intervention is determined by the client. Moreover, development processes take time, significant periods of time; and their flow - in terms of both time and outcome - cannot be determined beforehand. An effective development practice **accompanies** clients through their developmental changes; once-off interventions and pre-designed packages are quite literally besides the point.

Finally, while all clients develop, none does so in quite the same way as any other. So developmental interventions are not expert products or packages of resources delivered as input to organisations. Rather, they are processes which are created and applied in response to particular situations. Whatever else they are, and whatever else they deliver, they are purposefully and specifically geared towards helping people gain an understanding of themselves such that, in time, they are better able to take control of their own future and to themselves arrive at effective solutions to questions, problems and concerns, including economic and political marginalisation. This is not to say that the development practitioner should not play an activist role - on the contrary, solidarity is vital, as is the creation of enabling environments in which people are freer to pursue their processes of development. It is only to say that development work itself must leave people in more control of their circumstances, whatever those may be, and not subservient to those circumstances, however advantageous these may be.

Ultimately, then, the development paradigm which we are articulating here has little to do with the transfer of resources, which we saw earlier as the notion which informed the traditional approach to development. On the contrary, development is about **facilitating resourcefulness**, and this is a vastly different take on a very tired subject. A perspective which demands a vastly different response from practitioners. We would like to take the reader through the points raised in the previous section, in the same sequence, in order to demonstrate the difference between the conventional, and this alternative, paradigm.

- Development cannot be created or engineered. As a process, it exists independently of the development practitioner. All that we can do is facilitate processes which are already in motion. Where they are not in motion, it would be best - and honest - to refrain.
- Development is not something which is brought. Being driven from within, it is not the prerogative of an outsider. Respect for the integrity of others' processes must be paramount, not simply from a moral point of view but because of the reality of the development process. As development practitioners we can assist the flow of the process, but nothing more. It is not so much that we should not impose, but that we cannot - witness the history of the development endeavour to date.
- Real - and read here also honest - development work cannot be done to others on behalf of third parties. (Third parties being those with a vested interest - however benign - in the future of others whom they resource, influence or control). Development interventions have to flow out of the development processes of those seeking to develop. If development interventions are designed by third parties, and not through the free interaction between development worker and client, then it must categorically be stated that the result is not development work; it becomes at best a patronising collusion, at worst a cynical manipulation. This has huge implications for current practice with respect to the financing of development. Instead of fearful control, space must be allowed for real and responsive development practice to take place.
- Similarly, intervention specifications which are predetermined, and which do not respond to accurate and sensitive readings of the particular situation with which a development practitioner is faced, will warp and destroy the development process. And also, because situations change continuously in response to the development intervention (and other factors) responsiveness and flexibility and mobility are required from the development practitioner. And from the development organisation. This places large responsibility on the practitioner and organisation, and

demands new capacities with respect to - at least - reflecting, learning and managing.

- Development is not linear and predictable. Quite the contrary. We can never know quite what will flow out of a development intervention. There will always be outcomes which had never been planned, detours from paths which had been planned, unexpected reactions and contradictory achievements. An accurate reading of the actual - and largely intangible - developmental place where the client is at will help, but never entirely. Output is never based on input but on a complicated array of factors, including the precise relationship between input and the developmental process being intervened upon. Our assumptions will always be inadequate, although of course they must be made, for they form the foundation of any intervention; but always with due caution.
- Development has no end; the effective development intervention opens things up, rather than closes them down. Equally, development does not begin when we decide to intervene; it had already begun. The concept of the development project, then, with its beginning and end, its externally generated specifications, its notion of predictability and its lack of adaptability and mobility, has little to do with the effective development intervention, let alone with development itself. Indeed, the concept of the development project is anathema to the concept of development. It is a figment of an engineering mindset, at best a managerial tool used by a form of management inimical to development work, at worst a donor requirement to fulfil inappropriate financial control systems. Given its place at the very heart of the development system, it demonstrates both the rottenness at the core of that system as well as the system's intractability. It is the repository of all that is wrong with conventional development practice, and the greatest stumbling block to effective development interventions. (It is ironic that so much that goes by the name of capacity building today entails training NGO management in what is called project management).

This is not to say that development practitioners and organisations should be given freedom (and license?) to simply do whatever they want without frameworks to ensure accountability. It is not to say that parameters should not be set for development interventions. Such parameters would include objectives, time-frames, strategies and evaluation criteria. But it is important to regard these as guidelines for continuous monitoring, learning and adaptation - on the part of practitioner, client and donor - with respect to intervention processes. It is imperative that we recognise the development process as the issue, rather than successful

implementation of a particular project. And it is critical to understand the project as a mere fragment of such process, rather than confuse it with the development process itself.

- It was George Bernard Shaw who stated that: Reformers mistakenly believe that change can be achieved through brute sanity. Processes of development are beset with unconscious factors, and realities of tradition, culture, motivation and resistances to change. We fool ourselves at our own peril, and we have been fooling ourselves for years.
- Quite simply, development practitioners skilled in facilitating processes of change are of far more value to the development endeavour than technical experts, advisors or trainers.
- Development always, somewhere, assumes a preferred culture or value system, or way of doing things. This is implied in the very notion of intervening in others' processes. We can mitigate this, but we will never get rid of it entirely, even when we operate out of an alternative development paradigm. This takes us immediately to the next point.
- It is precisely because of our own unconscious projections and assumptions that we, as development practitioners, have to pay attention to our own development. This is not a luxury, and it is not an addendum to other capacities; it is a central requirement of the discipline. At the very least, how can we possibly presume to intervene in others' development if we do not understand our own, or if we are not prepared to engage in our own? At the most, it will enable us to read the developmental processes of others without that reading being tainted by our own unconscious and unworked through norms, beliefs, values and psychological disabilities.
- Participation is an end, not simply a means. The whole point of development is to enable people to participate in the governance of their own lives. If this is not seen then the entire development endeavour becomes a farce.
- The insistence that successful development projects be replicable - as a condition for that success - assumes that different situations are equal to each other. On the contrary, every situation is unique; every client is on their own development trajectory. Certainly we can learn principles and guidelines, develop insights, from both successful and unsuccessful development interventions, but the attempt to replicate is part folly and part disrespect for the specificity of people's processes of development.

- The issue of sustainability is a thorny one. In its current general usage as financial sustainability, the concept is inadequate, inappropriate and sometimes harmful as an assessment of a successful development programme; stability and stasis are foolish expectations. Sustainability, in terms of its applicability to development interventions, is more about achieving the ability to keep moving, changing, and improving one's *response-ability* to inevitably shifting circumstances, rather than assuming that those circumstances will ever be finally and successfully resolved, once and for all.
- The evaluation of development interventions must therefore take place against the background of the specific development process which has been intervened into, not against the ends stipulated in a project document. This too has radical and far-reaching implications. There is often far more that might have been gained beyond the boundaries of original expectations, if we are only open to looking beyond these boundaries, and beyond the boundaries of our own input.

## **SYNTHESIS**

*"Learning has to move to the heart of practice"*

David Sogge

The arguments raised above, as well as their meaning for a new form of development practice, demand further elaboration to respond to at least some of the questions which must arise. We attempt some response to some of these questions in this section, through three inter-linked movements.

### **First Movement**

One of the questions which may arise has to do with evaluation, and poverty. What has been said thus far is all very well, but it says nothing of poverty, of the eradication - or at least alleviation - of poverty; and surely this, after all, is the whole thrust of the development endeavour. Development interventions are ultimately about reducing poverty, are they not? So it's all very well making fine points about the development *process*, but how does this relate to people's needs, and how can we claim that the evaluation of development interventions must take place against the background of the specific development process which has been intervened into ... , rather than in terms of whether it has made any material difference in people's circumstances? What does it help that people gain an understanding of themselves if we have not been able to improve their material circumstances?

We could reply that, after decades of conventional development practice which has been governed by this economic perspective, the levels of poverty in our world - as economically defined - have increased rather than decreased.

We could also say - as indeed we have already - that helping people gain an understanding of themselves is done in order that they are better able to take control of their own future and to themselves arrive at effective solutions to questions, problems and concerns, including economic and political marginalisation.

We could say too that there are many ways to combat poverty, or achieve political change, but not all of them are particularly or specifically developmental. Whilst the political activist and economic reformer may play roles of incalculable value, and whilst development practitioners may also choose to play these roles as well as their own, nevertheless these are all different ways of dealing with poverty, and not all of them leave people in a better position to move with confidence into their own future. In other words, while the reduction of poverty may certainly feature prominently in judgements on development interventions, it cannot be the only measure, and indeed, it may at times be an inaccurate measure.

So we could use all these arguments, and in fact we do, but in a sense, despite their validity, they are slightly beside the point; at least beside one of the major points which emerges from this kind of discussion of development. And this is that the material, economic perspective on poverty is only one way of framing the subject, and a culturally specific one at that. Put another way, there are many forms of poverty, economic poverty being only one of these. And the question arises as to how much other poverty we create when our goal is narrowly defined as the alleviation of economic poverty. When all values are subsumed to the economic, as they increasingly are, particularly within

a conventional development paradigm, how much do we lose with respect to social values, to artistic values, to cultural and language diversity, to bio-diversity? We must surely recognise by now that the world we are creating with our fixation on the economic is becoming immeasurably poorer with respect to everything which lives outside of the economic.

And the reason that the three arguments mentioned previously are slightly beside the point is because the general fixation on the economic creates another, much more insidious, type of poverty - lack of choice. Increasingly, people are being expected to toe the economic line, and freedom to choose other, to opt for culturally different priorities, is frowned upon as in some sense deviant. In this sense we are all being co-opted towards the creation of our own poverty, in the name of poverty alleviation!

Yet a real development practice, the efficacy of development interventions, must be judged on other grounds. People-centered development is about increasing, not decreasing, choice. If it is about enabling people to become more conscious, to understand themselves and their context such that they are better able to take control of their own future, if it must leave people in more control of their circumstances, whatever those may be, and not subservient to those circumstances, however advantageous these may be, then it cannot narrowly define itself as poverty alleviation in the conventional sense.

Therefore judgements on the efficacy of specific development interventions, while they must include the element of (conventionally defined) poverty alleviation, must also go beyond, and take place against the background of the specific development *process* which has been intervened into. The development endeavour is about poverty alleviation, yes, but in a much wider sense than is currently acknowledged. Development interventions, surely, should not result in a reduction of the world, but in an increase of possibilities.

## **Second Movement**

Given all that has been said above, the question emerges as to how then one actually apprehends development, and the development process. Earlier in the text we have, on a number of occasions, referred to the idea of reading development. We would like here to elaborate this concept.

Conventionally, we have learned not to intervene until we have done a needs assessment, or a needs analysis; until we have done an inventory, or an audit; until, through questionnaires or more participatory techniques we have ascertained the parameters of a situation. These methods, and the information they are intended to elicit, remain valid and relevant, but are not sufficient. Reading development implies something more.

CDRA's experience in capacity-building, with respect to organisation, community and individual development, has yielded a certain perspective on capacity, which is our entry point into understanding this concept of reading. We will summarise briefly.

From our work with organisations - which is our starting point - we ascertained a number of elements which must be present and coherent for an organisation to be said to have capacity, or to be effective. These are - arranged sequentially in a hierarchy of importance - the following:

- A **conceptual framework** which reflects the organisation's understanding of the world;
- An **organisational attitude** which incorporates the confidence to act in and on the world in a way that the organisation believes can be effective and have an impact, and an acceptance of responsibility for the social and physical conditions out there;
- Clear organisational **vision and strategy**, and sense of purpose and will, which flows out of the understanding and responsibility mentioned previously;
- Defined and differentiated organisational **structures and procedures** which reflect and support vision and strategy;
- Relevant individual skills, abilities and competencies;
- Sufficient and appropriate **material resources**. (We have subsequently, both through our own work as well as in dialogue with other development practitioners working in many different areas, affirmed that this hierarchy of importance holds its validity, although with slightly different slants and angles, across community and individual capacity as well).

The aspect of this hierarchy which is relevant to our discussion here is this. That if you look towards the bottom of the hierarchy, you will see those things which are quantifiable, measurable, elements of capacity which can be easily grasped and worked with. They belong to the realm of material things, easily assessed and quantified; they belong to the realm of the visible. If however, we turn our attention to the top of the hierarchy, we enter immediately an entirely different realm, the realm of the invisible. The elements at the top of the hierarchy are ephemeral, transitory, not easily assessed or weighed. They are to a large extent intangible, observable only through the effects they have. In other words, individual, organisational and community life ranges from the visible, more tangible aspects to those which are less visible, more intangible; and it is these latter aspects which by and large determine capacity.

To this we must add two further points. First, that while every individual or grouping may share similar features, nevertheless each is unique, both in itself and in terms of its stage of development, and this uniqueness demands unique, singular and specifically different responses. And second, while the framework presented above may adequately describe the elements of capacity and even the order of their acquisition, it cannot predict or determine change processes, which are complex, ambiguous and often contradictory.

Reading development, then, apprehending the particular dynamics of an individual's or grouping's development trajectory or process, given that so much of it lies beneath the surface, veiled and continuously mutating, demands far more than the kinds of techniques we have become used to, for these are only designed to elicit the material, the tangible. In reality, one needs intelligence, acuity, mobility and penetrating perception to be able to read the particular nature of a specific developmental process. The development practitioner needs genuine observation and listening skills, and the ability to combine an open and non-judgemental approach with enough understanding to make sense of, and draw insight out of, what one is observing. We need to take the time, and have the flexibility, to read specific situations in this way in order to design appropriate and necessarily transitory - necessarily because the individual or grouping being worked with will develop beyond a particular intervention as a result of the effectiveness of that intervention - interventions based on such intelligent reading. A reading of development must remain supple, subtle and nuanced; it must be iterative and gradual; it must be reflective and reflexive. We must penetrate, but softly, so that we can intuit underlying movements; and do so in such a way that the individual or grouping is itself enabled to come to such awareness and understanding.

Such capacities, such competencies, are new abilities which we as development practitioners need to develop - they are not skills in which we can be trained. The conventional development paradigm sees only skills in which practitioners can be trained - along the lines of engineers or technicians. The alternative development perspective demands a more developmental approach to building the capacity of its practitioners; it demands the original skills but adds abilities which may perhaps - by way of contrast - be described by analogy as artistic.

This ability to read is therefore not to be gained on training programmes, although these may provide a useful starting point. This set of abilities must be achieved gradually, through guided reflection on action, through facilitated self-critique, through mentoring and sharing with peers, through observing one's own development and through learning to make use of alternative modes of description in order to penetrate beyond - metaphors, similes, images and narrative. Developmental readings cannot be contained within the cold and dry parameters of the conventional reporting format; warmer and more human forms must be developed, to support the reading itself.

### **Third Movement**

Given all the implications drawn out of an alternative perspective on development practice, the final area to which we must make reference concerns the management of such a practice. This will also lead us to address the question of the development project, which is a management tool which we have criticised as being the repository of all that is wrong with conventional development practice, and the greatest stumbling block to effective development interventions. If this is indeed the case, then what would we recommend to replace it?

We will not go into detail here with respect to alternative management methodologies and tools as these must be created for specific organisational circumstances and needs. What we will concern ourselves with here are some indications as to the principles and attitudes which may guide our understanding of what constitutes good managerial practice for a new form of development. Building such understanding is all that the reflections contained in these Reports is intended to achieve. We would expect practitioners to make use of such understanding as they see fit.

If we are looking for a responsive development practice which is able to build appropriate and flexible interventions in accordance with nuanced and subtle readings, in a context fraught with ambiguity and uncertainty and continuous change, then a number of things follow. First, you have to develop effective development practitioners, practitioners who do not work out of books or project manuals, practitioners who do not work primarily out of the specifications of the world from which they have been sent but rather out of an accurate and sensitive reading of the particular situation with which they are faced. And this does not mean training them in new techniques, but fostering their development through guided reflection on action, facilitated self-critique, mentoring, peer reviews, and so on - all already mentioned above. (Already, you see, most management practices, judged simply by this first guideline, will be found wanting).

Second, they must be allowed the space to be creative with respect to their styles of reading, their styles of reporting, their methods of facilitation (and yes, this applies to donor programme officers as well). Of course, this plays havoc with bureaucratic organisational styles, and requires a very fluid and responsive form of management. One which is simultaneously very hands-on and hands-off. Rigorously present, although with a very light touch. This is very different from the conventional. But how can we possibly expect a management style which is different from the form of development practice which it is attempting to manage?

Third, the supervision of these development practitioners, holding them accountable, must take a form which is different from the conventional judgement by objectives type of management. Of course, these criteria must be fulfilled; we have to know that the job is being done. But if the reading of development is what we have described it to be, if the evaluation of development interventions is as specific and nuanced as we have indicated, then supervision of the development practitioner is complex and intense. It requires, above all, that within the organisation as a whole, and between development practitioners, and between them and their managers, and between the managers themselves, a **continuous conversation** is kept alive, a striving to consciousness and awareness by the organisation and amongst its many parts. This kind of conversation can take many forms, some of which may be informal (which will be dependent on the fostering of the appropriate organisational culture), some of which may be formal and structured, following set procedures (presentations of case studies, group discussions around particular programmes, and so on); but such

ongoing conversation constitutes the heart of appropriate management practice for development.

Fourth, and following from the above, management must be geared to ensure that the organisation is learning all the time, that it is open and flexible, guided by principle rather than by technique or methodology, by experience and practice rather than by academic theory or ad hoc fashion, by its own understanding rather than by its back donors. Management has to ensure that organisational reflection and learning are not add ons, not something done in addition to the real work, but in fact constitute the real work itself.

Fifth, and perhaps most important, responsibility and authority must be decentralised, devolved to the outer limits of the organisation, to as great an extent as possible. In a previous Annual Report (1993/94) we pointed to the unacceptable marginalisation of the development practitioner - whom we referred to in that report as fieldworker - due to the fact that they work on the periphery of the organisation, while power tends to concentrate in the centre. A responsive and flexible development practice can only be achieved by the organisation which has responsive and flexible practitioners out there, in the (development) field, reading the development process of its clients/counterparts and facilitating responsive interventions. To achieve this, power must move to the periphery. There are various methods for effecting this; suffice to say here that the first four points mentioned above are prerequisites for this kind of managerial stance.

So what of the ubiquitous and infamous development project? For the rest of us, we are entirely constrained by donor practice; until it changes, we have little freedom to choose. So far as donors themselves are concerned, we have regarded them throughout these discussions - as we do in our practice generally - as being development practitioners, along with the rest of us, albeit practitioners who provide a very particular development intervention. For them - although not only for them - the need for financial controls remains paramount. It may be difficult to imagine control being exercised outside the boundary of the project, although moves towards programmes, or towards organisational rather than project funding, will help, and are not difficult to effect. More flexible methods, which will still satisfy the bookkeepers, can certainly be found if the organisational will is there. But the truth is more profound - and (perhaps) even less believable. If the five indications for an appropriate developmental management practice already mentioned are taken seriously by donors as well, then the development project will gradually metamorphose of its own accord, to be replaced by a form which we cannot clearly imagine at present. Which, indeed, is a perfect manifestation of a central aspect of the development process itself - that we first have to let go of the old before we can hope to take on the new, let alone quite know what it will be.