

"DIALOGUE FOR DEVELOPMENT"

This final project is designed as a 'manifesto' of sorts – a summary of some key principles derived from the reflections I had while taking this course. As such, it will be useful for me as I provide ongoing leadership to the work of FH Cambodia, a faith-based organization which implements an integrated community development process across 47 villages in northern Cambodia. However, I am hopeful that it will also function more broadly as an ongoing reminder of key principles of development. (Incidentally, the title is drawn from a phrase in the article on "Sustainable Rural Development in Western Africa: The Naam Movement and the Six 'S'," by Takehiko Uemura.)

We must recognize that development has not been a dialogue but a discourse driven by the powerful.

The way in which the modern project of 'development' has been understood and implemented in the past several decades has been a power-laden discourse driven by the outlooks and interests of powerful and wealthy societies. While we recognize that there have been altruistic impulses moving the development enterprise forward, it is undeniable that the imperial/colonial perspective has profoundly 'colored' the entire project.

Development is positive social change oriented toward comprehensive well-being.

Despite the forgoing principle, we should not reject the language or principle of 'development,' for it is in fact a very good thing when understood appropriately. We all want to move our communities toward a greater sense of well-being. One way in which we prevent the process of development from being hijacked by the 'development discourse' is by insisting that the goal of development – comprehensive well-being – is defined by the community. We expect that there will be many aspects of life that most (if not all) communities would include in a vision of comprehensive well-being. Most communities, we are convinced, would prefer that their children live long and healthy lives. Most communities would prefer to live lives that are free of danger and disease. Other aspects of life may be more varied in their inclusion in a community's vision of well-being. Some societies and communities might highlight economic productivity as part of their vision of well-being, while others would prefer a life of simplicity and sustainability. Each community must retain the freedom and right to adopt its own vision of well-being as the objective of development.

Effective development rests on an indispensable foundation of community ownership and responsibility.

A corollary of the preceding principle is that development is based on the foundation of community ownership and responsibility. Development belongs to the community. The vision is theirs, the process is theirs, and the responsibility for success or failure is theirs. Any involvement of outsiders in this process must respect, affirm, and support this fundamental premise of development.

A community's vision of comprehensive well-being must be sharpened through dialogue.

While the vision of comprehensive well-being belongs to the community, we also recognize that the community will benefit from people *outside* their context and the varying perspectives that these people bring to the development process. The reality of human nature is such that we have 'blind spots.' We may not be aware of important realities that impact us. This may be because we lack certain expertise and experience, because our perspective is too short-sighted, because our culture influences what we see and do not see, or because our experience leads us NOT to look at certain things. Communities, then, benefit from outsiders who offer alternative perspectives for the community to consider. This must never be done in a way that usurps the central role of the community in its own development, but can nevertheless be a strong and emphatic presentation of important realities. Through this dialogue, we can hope that the vision of the community with regard to comprehensive well-being will become more accurate (that is a truer perception of what really IS best for that community in the long term) and more clear. It is also anticipated that this

dialogue will not only benefit the community through the perspective of the ‘outsider,’ but that the outsider herself will be changed and challenged in the process of experiencing the community’s insider perspective.

Partnership can be a key vehicle toward development.

Because of this importance of dialogue, and because communities frequently lack all of the knowledge and resources that are essential to moving successfully toward their vision of comprehensive well-being, we recognize that partnership can be an important vehicle to help communities move forward. This partnership may entail the invitation by the community toward an external agency (organization, company, faith community, etc.) to join them in their journey toward their vision of well-being. We believe that the non-government organization, properly structured, is especially suited for this type of partnership.

Effective development is appreciative.

We believe that effective development is appreciative. This means that the process of development focuses initially on the positive realities and resources already present in the community, rather than an immediate focus on ‘problems.’

Effective development is oriented toward the freedom of expanding capacities.

In line with the thinking of Amartya Sen, we believe that the process of development involves expanding the capacities of the community to pursue their own vision of well-being, their own understanding of a ‘life worth living.’ The process of providing additional perspectives through dialogue is a key part of this process, for a wider range of options represents a broader range of freedom.

Effective development is incarnational.

The term here reflects a theological construct from the Christian faith: the declaration that, in order to redeem humanity, God in fact became a human. Christians have taken this doctrine as a model for interactions with others. Indeed, the ‘partnership’ which engages in the process of development must be highly relational, and the outsider must intentionally and self-consciously adapt himself to the sociocultural realities of that community’s life. He must reject the ‘markers’ of professionalism, prestige, and power and humbly share life with the community.

Effective development is sustainable (environmentally and socially).

A vision of comprehensive well-being is ultimately inadequate if it is not viable for the long term. Here we especially appreciate Village Earth’s definition of the ‘long term’ as ‘seven generations.’ The process of development must therefore ensure the creation of structures and processes within the community which ensure this long-term viability. This means ensuring that the process of development does not undermine the natural resources and environment which provides the abiding context for the community’s life. It also means ensuring that the process of development does not generate a social dependency on external partners to the detriment of sustainable and contextual social institutions within that community.

Effective development is integrated.

Finally, we recognize that effective development is integrated. We affirm that life is not lived in sectors. Therefore, a purely sectoral approach will be ultimately ineffective. Even claims of being ‘multi-sectoral’ are suspicious, since that can mask the clustering of distinct and separate sectoral programs. The journey of development must embrace every aspect of life, and intentionally pursue linkages and connections between these different aspects to produce synergistic and life-giving results.