

Basic Needs. What is Development?

Development and Basic needs: It is not easy to determine what **development** really means with respect to different countries and to categorise them as more or less developed. It is somewhat easier to say which countries are richer and which are poorer. But indicators of wealth, which reflect the number of resources available to a society, provide no information about the allocation of those resources. Hallmarks of prosperity indicate, for instance, more or less equitable distribution of income among social groups, the shares of resources used to provide free healthcare and education services, and the effects of production and consumption on environment among other. Thus, it is no wonder that countries with similar average income can differ substantially when it comes to people's quality of life – something to be defined as the complexity of factors that have resulted from satisfying **basic needs**. These basic needs count on the availability of clean air, safe drinking water and food, access to education and healthcare, safe and secure residence, employment opportunities, political freedom and so on. However, a demarcation between basic needs and human rights should be stated. With that in mind, how do we determine which countries are more developed and which are less developed? (World Bank Development Education Program, 2004, p.7)

‘Nanda Shrestha was born in central Nepal. His family survived by cultivating non-irrigated crops for subsistence and selling millet liquor. Hunger was common and their small house let the rain in. According to present-day assessments, his family and the wider community would certainly be classified as very poor and disadvantaged. However, for Shrestha, the perception of their situation was very different: Despite all this, it never seemed threatening or dehumanizing. So, poor and hungry I certainly was. But underdeveloped? I never thought – nor did anybody else – that being poor meant being ‘underdeveloped’ and lacking human dignity. True there is no comfort and glory in poverty, but the whole concept of development (or underdevelopment) was totally alien to me.’
(Willis, 2011, p.33)

It is, then, of crucial importance to be clear according to whose standards ‘development’ is being measured and how it is **defined**:

‘for a definition to be operational – that is, for it to identify an object without the possibility of error – it must first of all eliminate all ‘preconceptions’, ‘fallacious ideas that dominate the mind of the layman’, and then base itself upon certain ‘external characteristics’ common to all phenomena within the group in question. Or – to put it

more bluntly – we must define ‘development’ in such a way that a Martian could not only understand what is being talked about but also identify the places where ‘development’ does or does not exist.’
(Rist, 2009, p.10)

Durkheim (in Rist, 2009, p.10) states very clearly:

‘This rule, as obvious and important as it is, is seldom observed in sociology. Precisely because it treats everyday things [...] we are so accustomed to use these terms, and they recur so constantly in our conversation, that it seems unnecessary to render their meaning precise.’

Basic Needs: preconditions for development. According to Maslow, the individual development is a process of climbing hierarchical levels of needs aiming the top level of self-actualisation. The starting force behind this desire for ‘climbing’ the pyramid is the need itself that generates motivation for satisfying it and finally results in actions that raise the individual’s development level. (Maslow, 1954, p.107)

In human behaviour theory it is represented the following way:

A lack of something (need) → desire for satisfying the need (motivation) → taking action (behavioural response)

It could be generalised that all needs could be a starting force for development not only in the case of individual evolution but also in a community that is forced by a common factor or factors (stimuli) as in the example:

The lack of enough land and the need of protecting it from floods affected the Dutch population in the endangered areas in a way that, for satisfying a basic need like the availability of land, they were motivated to elaborate methods and realise them in practice. That led to the development of different skills, like building dykes and water management, needed in this concrete situation that other nations that have not faced similar stimulus do not obtain. The availability of too much land in Africa, for instance, over-satisfies this need by default leaving its inhabitants with no specific skills that might have arisen in other circumstances. (This path of development of different features for evolutionary/ biological progress is also known under the name idioadaptation. In biological terminology, there are three more paths/directions of development but their accuracy is doubtless and applicable in all cases of human interaction. (Kostova, 2006, p.143)

It is obvious that development has been an object of many sciences and from a different perspective, it has its subjectivity (varying in its interpretation according to the context). In biology it stands for ontogenesis (individual) and evolution (sectional), in psychology – for self-actualisation but what does it stand for in sociology?

‘When psychologists speak of the development of intelligence, mathematicians of the development of an equation or photographers of the development of a film, the sense they give to the word ‘development’ is clear enough. Its definition is shared by everyone working within the same area. The situation is quite different, however, when it comes to the use of the word in ordinary language to denote either a state or a process associated with such concepts as material well-being, progress, social justice, economic growth, personal blossoming, or even ecological equilibrium.’
(Rist, 2009, p.8)

How sociologists research the development process:

‘Max Weber argued that human motivation and ideas were the forces behind change – ideas, values and beliefs had the power to bring about transformations. According to Weber, individuals have the ability to act freely and to shape the future. He did not see, as did Durkheim and Marx, that structures existed external to or independent of individuals. Rather, structures in society were formed by a complex interplay of actions. It was the job of sociology to understand the meaning behind those actions.’
(Giddens, 2009, p.20)

Weber saw ‘the power to bring about transformations’ (the power to boost development) as a feature/tool belonging to individuals. In an interaction system, however, there are always two sides to realise the interaction: individual and/against/in (a) group(s). The assumption that groups and their products affect the individual was supported by Durkheim and Marks and shows the opposite point of view:

‘For Durkheim, the main intellectual concern of sociology is the study of social facts. Rather than applying sociological methods to the study of individuals, sociologists should instead examine social facts – aspects of social life that shape our actions as individuals, such as the state of the economy or the influence of religion. Durkheim argued

that societies have a reality of their own – that there is more to society than simply the actions and interests of its individual members. According to Durkheim, social facts are ways of acting, thinking or feeling that are external to individuals and have their own reality outside the lives and perceptions of individual people. Another attribute of social facts is that they exercise a coercive power over individuals.’

(Giddens, 2009, p.14)

Combining the two interpretations, concluding that individuals affect societies and societies effect individuals are, in fact, the two opposite sides of one processes – interaction, where the bigger (the society) includes in itself, the smaller (the individual) or - to name it according to the original – societies *envelop* individuals and individuals *develop* societies. Of course, it is a further theoretical approach to ‘development’, but it may help us in comprehending and re-comprehending its depth.

References:

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