

Session on Development Theory - Dynamics of Social Change

DEVELOPMENT THEORY

By Ashok Natarajan

I welcome all of you to this panel on Development Theory and its role in the dynamics of social change. Let me give a brief introduction to what Development Theory is about and let me brief you all also with respect to what has been done so far regarding accepting and implementing this theory for speeding up development.

For thousands of years the world has progressed very slowly and also in an uneven manner. Then suddenly in the last two centuries the momentum picked up and development has accelerated considerably and its spread has widened a lot also. In 1990 UNDP made the observation that the world has witnessed more progress in the last 50 years than it has done in the last 500 years which shows a ten-fold acceleration

Though development is a popular topic engaging the attention of academics, governments and citizens for a good deal of time, the reality is that our understanding of the process of development is still very incomplete. We know that the spurt in development in the last 200 years that the world has witnessed is connected with advances in technology, spread of universal education, adoption of modern commercial practices and the spread of democracy etc. But there is no uniform consensus on the relative importance of these factors and neither is there an understanding of how developmental potentials are being converted into developmental realities. Frankly speaking there is not even a widely recognized definition of what really development is.

The traditional conception of development is that it denotes improvement in living standards and economic performance. But it is clear to many people engaged in research in development issues that improvements in economic performance is closely linked to other political, social, educational and technological factors that lie outside the sphere of traditional economics. Obviously this would mean that a comprehensive theory of development would have to look at society as a whole and take into account the impact of changes in every aspect of social existence. The foremost change that we must consider is the change in people's attitudes which caught the eye of past Academy President Harlan Cleveland who coined the famous phrase " Revolution of Rising Expectations" to describe the increased aspirations of people for better income and living standards.

For the past four decades **The Mother's Service Society**, a Social Science Research Institute based in Pondicherry south of Chennai has been engaged in formulating a comprehensive theory of development based on 32 main principles and hundreds of auxiliaries. The research is based on the thoughts of India's noted philosopher Sri Aurobindo who lived in the 20th century. During the past 10 years MSS has actively collaborated with the Academy in exploring various dimensions of development. In the 1998 Vancouver GA a special half a day session chaired by Harlan and Garry Jacobs was devoted to discussing the Development Theory and a workshop was also conducted for applying this theoretical approach to solving several contemporary development issues. Following the GA WAAS published a small booklet entitled "**Human Choice: The genetic code for social development**" containing essays on this subject which is available on WAAS website. In the next year in 1999 MSS and WAAS cosponsored a 3-day workshop on development theory in Washington D.C with another follow-up 3 day workshop on the same theme at Chennai here in India also. Harlan, Ivo Slaus, Walt Anderson, Carl Heden and Bob Berg and Bernard Lieater were among the WAAS fellows who participated in that meeting. This same

subject also figured in another 3 day meeting held at New Delhi in 2004 which was sponsored by WAAS, MSS and other agencies. This was also discussed at the Zagreb GA.

We firmly believe that the formulation of a comprehensive theory of development will have a tremendous practical value. It can give us a clear insight into how and why development takes place and we can use that knowledge to accelerate the pace of development and remove impediments that stand in the way of further development. Even nations that feel that they have fully developed can use that knowledge to find out what more can be done. MSS is very pleased at this opportunity given to hold this session in collaboration with WASS.

Now I would like to introduce my co-panelists. My colleague Garry Jacobs is an American who has been living in India for the past 37 years. He is a consultant both in the field of business management and development issues. Together we have been researching in the field of development studies for the three decades and hope to come out with books about the comprehensive theory of development. Like Ivo he is also a trustee of the Academy and also chairman of the standing committee on Peace and Development.

Now that the introduction is over I would like to begin the session with a compact presentation on our conception of the process of development with a particular emphasis on the role of the U.S.A as an evolutionary leader. I hope to talk for 20 minutes and then allow 10 minutes for questions and comments. Garry will then talk. At the end of the session there should be about 20 minute left for general discussion.