**The Future of Development**

**From Global Crises to Global Convergence**

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**Global Crises and the Reinvention of Development**

The twenty-first century carries huge potential to be radically different from the nineteenth and twentieth. In this new global era, humanity possesses extraordinary material means as well as unprecedented degrees of reflexive knowledge and global communication. The challenge is to overcome legacies of the past and fully to realize today’s positive potentialities, to reverse present trends towards “global dystopia” and nurture sustainable progressive trends towards a future “global utopia”.

I start with the proposition that “globalization” – or, more particularly, “neoliberal economic globalization” as the driving paradigm shaping current global development – is failing. This paradigm cannot successfully expand or reproduce itself into the future without causing deeper crisis tendencies and systemic failures. Neoliberal economic globalization has reached its historic limits. Thus radical transformations of the present global status quo – including of the conception of “development” itself – offer the most effective and realistic way forward to address impending global crises of the twenty-first century.

Fortunately, there is an ongoing historical dialectic of “crisis and conscientization”: between an increasing popular awareness of the serious nature of global crises, on the one hand, and a reflexive process of introspection and consequent personal and cultural change, on the other. This dialectic provokes widespread cultural learning and social change, and the internalization of new attitudes towards “development”.

This trend holds in both Global North and Global South. Indeed, the past several decades have brought real change in the global structure inherited from the colonial era. The position of the Global South in this global framework has altered, and much potential now exists for the Global South to play an even greater role in shaping the future of the world community. We have indeed entered a new global era. Economic and political institutions bind virtually all countries into a common framework, deciding upon common rules and accepted norms and practices. It is a nascent “world society”, including also elements of a “world polity”.

Thus, rather than continue to frame “development” as a concept which applies solely to the so-called “less” or “under”-developed regions of the world, in a globalizing era all countries and regions of the world are interlocked in a mutual process of development. Future development is better understood not only as being global, but also as being open-ended. In fact, multiple processes of globalization, both economic and cultural, have already increasingly blurred the boundaries between different zones of the world. That said, “global development” does not imply the irrelevance of the “national”. Nor does it deny significant unevenness, inequality, and asymmetry of power. On the contrary, these features are endemic to current global development trajectories. Nevertheless, important solutions to present and future global crises may be formulated, institutionalized, and implemented via global processes of decision-making. Recognition of the material realities of a globalized world implies a historical need to construct a new global cultural and political order that is more equitable, just, transparent, and accountable – and therefore more effective in addressing future challenges.

A key question in this regard concerns capitalism. Can this mode of production solve the global crises of the twenty-first century? Can there be global development without global capitalism, and vice versa? Is global capitalism the enemy or the saviour? Given the unsustainable and destructive aspects of the present dominant paradigm of global economic development and the inability of the existing institutions of world order to effectively solve these crises, a reinvention of development is needed.

Indeed, the new global age brings the historic era of the “Anthropocene”, in which the interventions of humanity within the “web-of-life” are so extensive and so disruptive that our species has become a governing force in the future evolution of all life on this planet. Thus human beings bear an enormous global responsibility, both practically and morally. Failure to construct a future world order and paradigm of global development that genuinely respects the planetary limits of sustaining life will have potentially catastrophic consequences, not only for humanity, but for all life on earth.

Despite myriad forms of fragmentation and diversity amongst humanity today, we now live in a single “world civilization” and a single “world system”. We are one humanity (one species), living on one planet, consisting of one unified “web-of-life”, all mutually interdependent and ultimately bearing one common destiny.

Yet, despite so much apparent material progress over recent decades, this world civilization is beset by multiple crises, each of global scale, and each auguring an ominous future. Thus people must face the historical imperative to transform the future now, or collectively face grave negative consequences. In a word, our dominant paradigm of “development” must be transformed in order that not only humanity, but all life on earth may survive and flourish into the future.

**The Failures of “Really Existing Globalization” and the Specter of “Global Dystopia”**

Our present is characterized by a long-term underlying historical-structural tension: between on the one hand an ever more globalizing and materially integrated economic structure; and on the other hand the persistence of a system of territorially bounded sovereign (nation) states. This tension has been intensifying in recent years, demonstrated in recurrent and deepening global systemic instability and crisis. Far from the realization of millennial liberal dreams of “the end of history” and the final victory of liberal democracy and free market capitalism on global scale, the actual conditions of the post-Cold War era show deepening systemic crisis and growing global disorder, a period of “hegemonic rivalry” and potentially dangerous forms of global competition among multiple centers of wealth and power.

There is now also a growing specter of authoritarianism, accompanying parallel (but ostensibly “opposite”) tendencies towards the increasing transnationalisation of capital and global capitalism. Destructive environmental and social practices – for example, of “neo-extractivist” modes of economic development – are being pursued in the name of “economic growth”, but arguably are primarily organized by and benefit a narrow elite that operates within and across countries. Numerous states are complicit with these practices, even when the victims of this type of “development” are their own citizens and natural environment. Much of what has been passing for “development” may be better characterized as “mal-development”.

A recent rise of populist political currents, in both North and South, has been making a “nationalist” appeal to citizens, and rejecting alternative cosmopolitan responses to the tensions generated by an increasingly globalized world. Populist forces make retrogressive but seductive use of “national” belonging and community identity, inclusive towards “us” and exclusive towards “them“, or unwanted “others”. This battle between cosmopolitan visions and re-nationalized identity is another ominous contemporary trend in really existing globalization. It has been said that “fascism is capitalism in decay”. The “identity wars” of the twenty-first century have begun, and they feed into other negative systemic tendencies, such as increased international strategic tension, rearmament, and war.

Other tendencies towards historical retrogressions include reversal of the achievements of the welfare state, labour unions and workers’ rights, and the “mixed economy”. Instead, the most “developed” societies of the Global North have in the era of neoliberal economic globalization turned to marketization and privatization. The “model” of the “advanced countries” is now quite uncertain, and their moral authority is waning as a consequence.

The world still lacks an effective form of globally institutionalized crisis prevention and response, for coordination of disparate national economic and monetary policies. Given its absence, there is widespread anticipation of even more severe global financial and economic crisis in the future. This scenario is a direct consequence of the failure to transform the global system in the wake of the latest global financial and economic crisis. The G-20 states momentarily coalesced in the wake of the financial panic of 2008 and enacted (if only briefly) a semi-coordinated monetary and fiscal policy response designed to prevent another Great Depression. However, underlying competitive and divergent “national” interests have not been nullified in the post-crisis environment. The potential for further dystopian disorder remains very high.

**The Global South and the Future of Global Development**

The appeal of the idea of development, and the source of its enduring power, rests in its promise of future betterment for all humanity, for a rectification of the inequalities and injustices wrought by centuries of (primarily Western) imperialism. Development was to remake the world through overturning the vestiges of colonial order: economically by transforming the inherited old international division of labour, increasing the benefits to those in previously underdeveloped regions; and politically by achieving full independence and exercising national sovereignty, which in theory means deciding one’s own path to development. Two roads were open to achieve these historic ends: “development by means of international agreements”, especially international trade and investment rules; and “development by means of national economic policy”, whereby the newly independent states would pursue “catch up” to achieve the higher levels of development already enjoyed in the North.

Some have argued that international agreements alone would not be capable of delivering the full promise of development to the formerly colonized. The great asymmetries of power that exist in the world economic and political order have given powerful hegemonic states the ability to make the rules that govern others, such that the most powerful gain the greatest advantages in the system, at the expense of the least powerful. Many have therefore argued that only radical change of existing rules in the global economic order can enable successful development in the periphery.

Intergovernmental Third World solidarity thus arose along with political independence, through such bodies as the Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity Organization, the Group of 77, and the Non-Aligned Movement. The collective aim of the Global South to reform the rules that govern the world economic system was first pursued in the 1970s through the program for a New International Economic Order. A full account of the ultimate failure of the NIEO cannot be given here. Some blame the governing elites of the movement. Others blame powerful Northern actors, who divided the movement and obstructed the negotiations. Either way, the failure has had far-reaching and long-lasting consequences, as seen at present through continuing uneven global development, high rates of poverty, global inequality, and the globalization of environmental crises.

Yet the voice of the Third World has been rising in world economic governance since 2008 and the global financial crisis. Today the so-called “emerging powers” of the Global South are widely perceived, even celebrated, to be carriers of significant historic change, a “Rise of the Rest” in relation to the globally dominant “West”. This situation prompts a number of important questions about the role of the Global South in shaping the future of global development. Do the governing elites of “rising powers” act as global system challengers, or are they global system supporters? Do they challenge Western hegemony, and the dominant norms of global capitalism, or do they cooperate and seek economic advance within existing institutions and rules? Do they offer really different approaches to “development”, or do they only reproduce the existing dominant paradigm of economic development? Is their “solidarity” with each other vis-à-vis the West more symbolic than substantive? Are the elite of the Global South now “dreaming nationalist dreams, but using transnationalist means”? Do the economic strategies of transnational expansion pursued by actors from the Global South represent a new pattern of more equal South-South relations based on mutual benefit, or does the expansion of global investment from the Global South reproduce old patterns of inequality characteristic of North-South relations, a kind of “neo-dependency” conducted on a South-South basis? Is the global periphery of the “least developed” being re-subordinated to the rising economic power emanating from more economically powerful actors in the Global South?

Whatever the answers to these questions, increased “South-South” investment will significantly alter the global economic structure over the coming decades. Global South and Global North are increasingly “converging” into a singular global political economic structure, in which dominant norms and practices are in principle (but not always in practice) shared by all. Taken together, South-South regional integration projects and the proliferation of South-South bilateral economic agreements give Southern actors more voice to determine the future of Southern development. However, Southern voices in truly global decision-making bodies remain relatively weak, often disunited, and in some cases still marginal. If post-global crisis change in the power balance within such bodies as the IMF and G-20 remains more cosmetic than real, then little will actually change in the future of global development.

**Towards a “Global Utopia”: Reinventing Global Development**

Global history has been moving from the colonial era into the post-colonial era, and from the Eurocentric era into the Humanocentric era. The vision of transforming world order by overturning the legacies of imperialism is still as relevant as it was several decades ago. The preceding section briefly adumbrated some of the dystopian aspects of the still dominant paradigm of global development. In order to move forward, many patterns and practices of the recent era must be reversed and transformed. However, without an overall vision of the intended future world order, it is difficult to navigate or judge these changes. Therefore, the remainder of this essay lays out some key points for understanding an alternative future global development.

To begin with, a “reverse course” is needed to undo underlying tendencies that have generated serious crises and disorder within the present global political economic order. One key step is “de-globalization”, in the sense of overturning the ideology of neoliberal economic globalization and revalidating the right to pursue principles and practices of development that depart from this dominant ideology. In practice this reorientation de-emphasizes transnational economic relations and re-emphasizes local economic patterns. The reverse course also involves “de-concentration” to decrease the oligarchization of global wealth and power which has intensified under the neoliberal paradigm. De-concentration entails redistributing resources much more equitably both within and between countries. A further key step is “de-commodification”, which involves: (a) revalidating the public sector’s important role in political economy and the duty of care by the state to guarantee the livelihood and health of all citizens; (b) strengthening the rights of workers everywhere to determine key decisions affecting their working lives; and (c) enacting special measures globally to preserve biodiversity and prevent destructive exploitation of natural resources in key ecosystems around the world.

Five other “reverse course” tendencies also need to be actively pursued in order to re-stabilize and re-balance the global political economy. One is “de-financialization” of capital, re-regulation of global capital movements, and the implementation of global taxation on financial transactions. A second is re-nationalization (or other collectively undertaken forms of “de-privatization”) of important natural resources and key industries and public utilities (e.g. water, energy, transport, housing, minerals, forests, fisheries, and land). A third is “de-authoritarianization”, or rather “re-democratization”, by increasing devolution and decentralization of governance, strengthening popular sovereignty, and embedding new cosmopolitan forms of popular social power and responsibility from local to global levels. A fourth step is “re-commoning” of natural resources, especially those deemed most vulnerable to destruction or severe damage, and in some cases “re-wilding”, in the sense of re-establishing and restoring key species that maintain biodiversity and eco-system health. Fifth, de-militarization would reverse rearmament and (often regional) arms races, thus reducing international strategic tensions and increasing cooperation to maintain international peace.

Finally, “de-urbanization” would take future cities towards an urban-rural hybrid, bringing them closer to self-sufficiency with regard to food, water, and (renewable) energy. Meanwhile, “re-ruralization” in the countryside would reduce migration into the cities by providing access within rural environments to the amenities of urban life. New policy measures would help repopulate the rural areas in the Global North and stem the flow of mass migration within the Global South from relatively deprived rural areas to malfunctioning and overstretched urban communities. This pattern of social change might be summarized as: “the ruralization of the urban sphere and the urbanization of the rural sphere.” It represents a new type of global convergence, encompassing both Global North and Global South. Advanced designs of community architecture for sustainable lifestyles would be necessary in both the urban and rural spheres, North and South. This is not a model of self-sacrifice through lowering the quality of life, but on the contrary represents a new model which enhances the quality of life for both rural and urban populations, while both “converge” towards new types of ecologically and socially sustainable community living environments.

The general principles of social order for such an alternative global development paradigm would include equality, democracy (popular sovereignty), cosmopolitanism, and peace. These four cornerstones imply continued globally coordinated efforts: to eliminate absolute poverty everywhere; to ensure universal access to basic public health facilities; to eliminate extreme forms of exploitation, including human slavery; to encourage the devolution and decentralization of decision-making power and enhance popular sovereignty by democratic means at all levels of governance; to pursue with urgency the transition to post-fossil fuel energy and the rapid development of renewable energy sources globally; to protect vital areas of the natural environment to conserve biodiversity and combat climate change; and to pursue global disarmament through multilateral negotiation and new treaties involving all members of the United Nations organization.

These four principles of global development and world order (equality, democracy, cosmopolitanism, and peace) would be embedded in the historical movement towards “global convergence” between Global North and Global South, and between global urban spheres and global rural spheres. The historical end of that global convergence would be the formation of a genuinely new type of world society. The old cosmopolitan motto would apply: “Before nations, is all humanity”. Together, these tendencies would constitute a radically transformed pattern of global development. The ultimate source of such historical change would be not elites, but rather the majority of people of the world. The dialectic of crisis and conscientization, invoked at the outset of this essay, entails personal value change, leading to gradual cultural change and thereby to larger-scale social and political change. Local movements become linked to transnational movements, and transnational movements seek to realize alternatives to the currently dominant development paradigm. It is most important in the early twenty-first century that hope for a positive future be kept alive, for it is by hope, and by optimism of the will, that the world will most surely be transformed for the betterment of all.