

The Poverty of Development

What are the rationale and impetus behind the holding of the forthcoming international conference, "Issues of Culture, Context & Choice in Development"? Kevin Charles Kettle , SEAMEO-SPAFA and Libby Saul , IDP Education Australia (Thailand), respond to these questions, and provide more information on the conference, which is jointly organised by SEAMEO-SPAFA & IDP Education Australia (Thailand). It will be held (with the support of The Japan Foundation Asia Center in collaboration with UNESCO RACAP) in Bangkok between 28-30 November 2002

As SPAFA is dedicated to the pursuit of an 'equitable social and intellectual environment', it is therefore appropriate that the Centre should hold a forum to explore the issues of the cultural context of development. These issues focus on the appropriateness of many development projects that are conceived and then implemented without taking into account the issues of culture, context, and choice.

All too often 'economic' development is seen as the key to any development and is pursued whilst ignoring the cultural and social conditions specific to the country in which this 'development' takes place. However, if development is to be endogenous or sustainable, the cultural context must prevail and the development undertaken must be 'human-centred'. Development that ignores age-old traditions of communal solidarity, and in fact, derides this as 'underdevelopment',



Laos

threatens the foundations of social life and has tragic and far-reaching consequences.

Myth and Marginalisation

We know that peace can not be measured solely by the absence of conflict. It is inter-related with the just sharing of natural resources, social and economic development, and the promotion of human rights. More than ever there is an urgent need to ensure the successful outcomes of 'responsible' development policies in order to decrease the marginalisation or exclusion of various sectors of society that more often than not occurs along ethnic or religious lines. If we do not seek to rectify 'development' policies and goals we are left with disenfranchised groups that are now able to reach out for support for their own domestic agendas and, in turn, are susceptible to influence and manipulation from wider external agendas of others.



The modern 'global village' myth is a direct result of development policy directives that ignore the perspectives of the grassroots populations they are meant to serve by promoting 'global' rather than 'local' thinking. However, the paradigms of societies always come from their deeply held beliefs and traditions, and thus the need for society to be sustainable necessitates that one listens directly to indigenous peoples and that their values and lifestyles are not denied in the quest for universalism.

Poverty and Conflict

Since the events of September 11th, 2001, it has been noted by many that whilst poverty is certainly not the sole or direct cause of terrorism, exclusion can be a vital contributing factor that breeds violent conflict. Development aims to reduce, if not eliminate poverty, but in this process if it is not 'all inclusive' and if it is not socially just, we still are left with marginalised groups.

In fact, we need to begin to question the very notion of 'poverty' as perceived by the West. Indigenous lifestyles are not necessarily impoverished; on the contrary, they are 'culturally' rich with a sense of community and sharing. However, economic goals, as pursued in the majority of development objectives, are conceived in a top-down ethnocentric manner that ignores this fact.

Arturo Escobar, the Colombian anthropologist, comments that development was supposed to be about people, however, the

concerns of people are excluded because 'prepackaged' solutions ignore the fact that change is "...a process rooted in the interpretation of each society's history and cultural tradition". (1)

James D. Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank, in his article 'Fight Terrorism and Poverty', which examines the challenges facing development in the wake of September 11th, concludes that developing countries must be in the 'driving seat', "...designing their own programs and making their own choices" (2).



Indonesia

It now seems clearer than ever what we must do but the question is how to do it. This Conference, the concept of which was conceived well over a year ago, aims to provide some answers to that very question.

Conference Goals

The Conference objectives are:

1. Inculcate in the implementers of development projects the need to prioritise the emphasis of the cultural context within which the projects are proposed;
2. Promote the achievement of sustainability and future independence of donor-initiated projects for the benefit of the communities they intend to serve;

3. Contribute to the pursuit of an equitable social, economic, and intellectual environment by providing a forum for the exchange of views through the presentation



- and dissemination of related experiences on what defines responsible development and on how to proceed, thus benefiting directly at the grassroots level the people who are the stakeholders of development undertaken;
4. Increase mutual understanding, tolerance, and respect for diversity in cultures and

living contexts of people involved in the design and implementation of development programmes;



5. Heighten the relevance of choice in the formulation of projects to obtain successful outcomes.

This Conference will provide a vital stimulus to the conceptualisation and conduct of development projects, firmly placing culture, context, and choice, as key issues of concern.

Making a Difference

All persons concerned with striving for a world without poverty and conflict will find this Conference to be of interest to them. In particular, targeted participants include:

- * Major international development banks
- * International donor agencies
- * NGOs and IGOs
- * National and international organisations involved in policy, planning and implementation
- * Government agencies involved in policy, planning and implementation
- * National and international charity organisation and trusts
- * Private trusts, foundations and organisations who sponsor research or assist with the planning and implementation of community projects
- * National banks involved in the financing of major infrastructure projects
- * Private/Corporate sector financiers who invest in infrastructure or training projects
- * Economists, sociologists, anthropologists, environmental scientists, heritage specialists, historians, educationalists, language specialists

Consequently, speakers are also selected from these backgrounds so that a balance is arrived at between those representing donor agencies, recipients of development projects, NGOs, and governmental agencies.

Participation from community groups and youths is especially encouraged through the holding of the open forums with poster and photographic displays, workshop sessions on rural projects combined with the exhibition/marketplace space provided for informal discussion and presentation. It is felt that these two activities can encourage community groups and NGOs to participate more actively rather than if they were solely offered conventional means of paper presentations. The benefits for participants and speakers, as a result, will be a truly unique opportunity for frank exchanges and the sharing of knowledge and experiences in the knowledge that you can make a difference.

Key Themes

The key themes of the conference are:

Security, Solidarity and Co-operation

Every government has the responsibility of fostering diversity in the interests of global peace and stability. Key points to be addressed in this stream are:

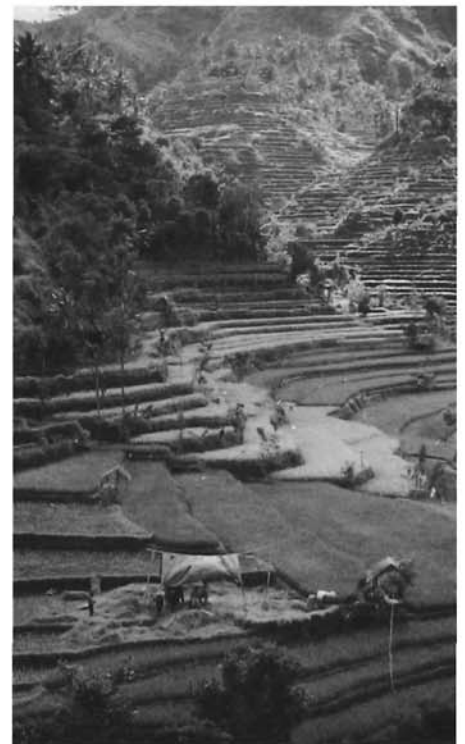
- a) What factors encourage citizens to initiate and pursue courses of action to address their concerns and what factors hinder them, including issues of language, literacy and gender;
- b) How to strengthen and promote the wide variety of initiatives by citizens to address issues and problems in their everyday lives;
- c) Cultural autonomy focusing on issues of identity and ownership;

- d) Exploring the balance between interventionism and integration.

The Changing Landscape of Knowledge

Wealth creation in the 'global' village is shifting from a resource to a knowledge-base to accommodate 'local' knowledge, thinking, and initiatives. This stream will focus on the knowledge economy. Themes to consider are:

- a) Communities and individuals as innovators;
- b) How to use knowledge effectively and efficiently, taking into consideration where relevant knowledge is obtained, how it is collected, stored, and transmitted to others;
- c) Developing strategies to take advantage of the knowledge economy including investing more in education and information and communications infrastructure;
- d) Examining the tensions between providing intellectual property rights and the



desirability of disseminating knowledge at a marginal cost.

Reconciling Requirements with Reality

This stream focuses on the issue of choice and how to maximise opportunities to facilitate the attainment of balance - a balance that reflects both donor and recipient needs whilst taking into account the social, political, and economic realities that must also be prioritised. Key areas to be highlighted here are:

- a) Reconciling national directives with local aspirations - including strategies for promoting conflict prevention, mediation, and resolution;
- b) Reconciling donor and recipient requirements/needs - including strategies for promoting conflict prevention, mediation, and resolution;
- c) Exploring project partnerships to widen outreach, impact, mutual benefits and the maximisation of participation - involvement of corporate sector, issues of HRD and capacity building;
- d) Examining how issues of accountability, monitoring and evaluation impact on choice.

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<http://spafa.idp.co.th>



India

REFERENCES

1. Arturo Escobar, 'The Problematization of Poverty: The Tale of Three Worlds and Development' in *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, extracted as *The Making and Unmaking of the Third World through Development in Post Development Reader*, Zed Books, London, 1997, p.91.
2. James D. Wolfensohn, 'Fight Terrorism and Poverty' in *Development Outreach*, Fall 2001