1. Social Development - Background

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What is Social Development?

Social Development encompasses a commitment to individual well-being and volunteerism, and the opportunity for citizens to determine their own needs and to influence decisions that affect them. Social development incorporates public concerns in developing social policy and economic initiatives.
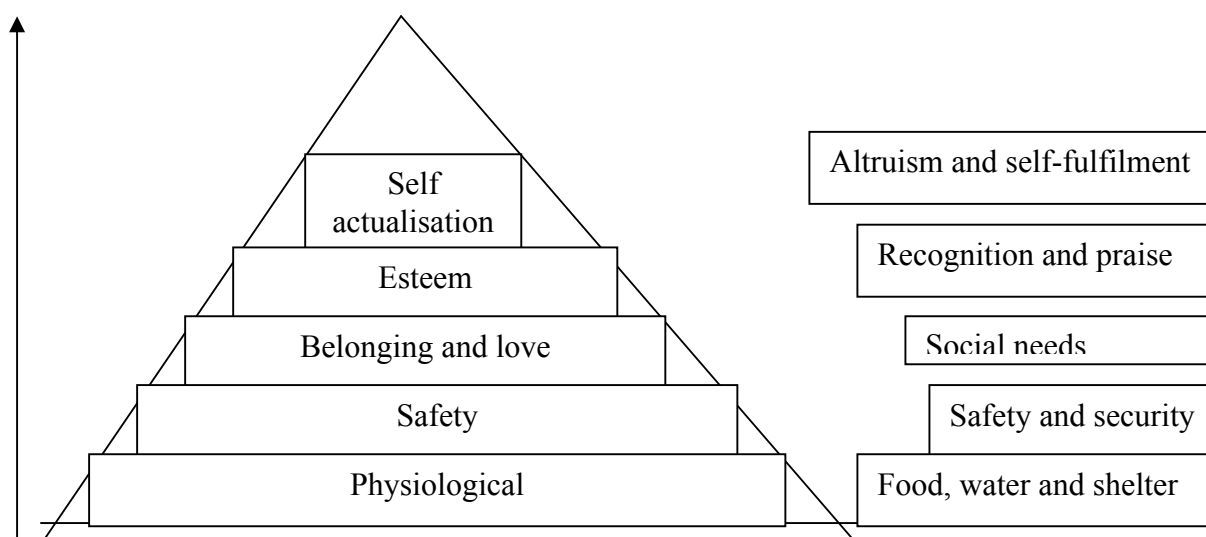
Until relatively recently, social development was conceived in terms of a set of desirable results - higher incomes, longer life expectancy, lower infant mortality, more education. Recently emphasis has shifted from the results to the enabling conditions, strategies and public policies for achieving those results - peace, democracy, good governance, social freedoms, equal access, laws, institutions, markets, infrastructure, education and technology. But still little attention has been placed on the underlying social process of development that determines how society formulates, adopts, initiates, and organises, and few attempts have been made to formulate such a framework. However, there are some recognised theories and principles, which will be examined briefly.

Key Social Development Principles

Social development is defined in the broadest social terms as an upward directional movement of society from lesser to greater levels of energy, efficiency, quality, productivity, complexity, comprehension, creativity, choice, mastery, enjoyment and accomplishment. Development of individuals and societies results in increasing freedom of choice and increasing capacity to fulfil its choices by its own capacity and initiative.

Growth and development usually go together, but they are different phenomena subject to different laws. Growth involves an expansion of existing types and forms of activities. Development involves a qualitative enhancement. Social development is driven by the subconscious aspirations of society for advancement or progress. Society (and individuals) will seeks progressive fulfillment of a prioritised hierarchy of needs – security of borders, law and order, self-sufficiency in food and shelter, organisation for peace and prosperity, expression of excess energy in entertainment, leisure and enjoyment, knowledge, and artistic creativity.

Motivation is complex and highly individual. The motivation to work can be physical (earning money for food or shelter), psychological (seeking social satisfaction or security) or more unconscious and instinctive – which applies particularly to altruistic and self-fulfilment reasons. One of the most popular theories explaining motivation is Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs', which categorises human motivations as follows: -

The theory works on the basis that needs are only motivators when they are unsatisfied. The lower order needs (physiology and safety) are dominant until satisfied, when the higher needs come into being.

This theory is important in terms of social development theory, as it helps to explain why more altruistic concerns (such as animal protection activity) are often not burning social issues until society has developed to a level that meets individuals lower order needs (personal, shelter, security etc.).

As can be seen, in the course of social development, society is moved by a range of different psychological motives. Self actualising motives (wanting self-development and altruistic aims for higher ethical reasons) are normally the last to be fulfilled. However, the globalisation of culture and information is bringing such concerns more rapidly into public consciousness. The revolution of rising expectations represents a new and more powerful motivating force for development, for by its nature it is not limited, as all the others have been, to a specific class or section of society.

Development of society occurs only in fields where the collective will is sufficiently strong and seeking expression. Development strategies will be most effective when they focus on identifying areas where the social will is mature and can provide better means for the awakened social energy to express itself. Only those initiatives that are in concordance with this subconscious urge will be likely to succeed and gain 'critical mass'.

Every society possesses a huge reservoir of potential human energy that is absorbed and held static in its organised foundations - its cultural values, physical security, social beliefs, and political structures. At times of transition, crisis, and opportunities, those energies are released and expressed in action. Policies, strategies, and programmes that tap this latent energy and channel it into constructive activities can stir an entire nation to action and rapid advancement. The implications of this for the animal movement, however, can be that if the 'time is not ripe' for the animal movement to 'take off' as a social movement in its own right, then tapping into other burgeoning social change concerns may be the most effective option.

Development requires an enormous investment of energy to break existing patterns of social behaviour and form new ones. Development takes place when surplus social

energies accumulate beyond the level required for functioning at the present level. The social energy may be released in response to the opening up of a new opportunity or confrontation by a severe challenge. Where different cultures meet and blend, explosive energies for social evolution are released.

Expression of surplus energy through existing forms of activity may result in growth - a quantitative expansion of society at the existing level of organisation. Channeling the surplus energy into more complex and effective forms of organised activity leads to development - a qualitative enhancement in the capabilities of the society. The fresh initiatives that lead to this qualitative enhancement usually occur first in the unorganised activities of society that are not constrained and encumbered by the inertia of the status quo.

The rate and extent of development is determined by prevalent social attitudes, which control the flow of social energies. Where attitudes are not conducive, development strategies will not yield results. In this case the emphasis should be placed on strategies to bring about a change in social attitudes - such as public education, demonstration and encouragement of successful pioneers.

The problem for various social change movements is how to press their movement's concerns up the ladder of people's hierarchy of needs (either through tapping into lower level needs, by intellectual challenge, or by emotional engagement).

Development proceeds rapidly in those areas where the society becomes aware of opportunities and challenges and has the will to respond to them. Increasing awareness accelerates the process. Increasing understanding of the potential to achieve change, and giving the tools to make this happen, increase the likelihood of change.

Social development consists of two interrelated aspects – learning and application. Society discovers better ways to fulfill its aspirations and it develops organisational mechanisms to express that knowledge to achieve its social and economic goals. The process of discovery expands human consciousness. The process of application enhances social organisation.

Development occurs when pioneering individual initiatives are imitated by others, multiplied and actively supported by the society. Society then actively organises the new activity by establishing supportive laws, systems and institutions. At the next stage, it integrates the new activity with other fields of activity and assimilates it into its educational system. The activity has become fully assimilated as part of the culture when it is passed on to the next generation as values through the family.

Development is a process, not a programme. Development is an activity of society as a whole. It can be stimulated, directed or assisted by government policies, laws and special programs, but it cannot be compelled by government or bureaucracy unless supported by the population. Development strategy should aim to release people's initiative, not to substitute for it.

Human beings are the ultimate resource and ultimate determinant of the development process. It is a process of people becoming more aware of their own creative potentials and taking initiative to realise those potentials. Human awareness, aspiration and attitudes determine society's response to circumstances. Development occurs only at the points where humanity recognises its power to determine results.

The Role of Civil Society

The development of social organisation takes place within a larger evolutionary context in which the consciousness of humanity is evolving along a continuum from physical to vital to mental. As society advances along this continuum, development becomes more conscious and more rapid.

Civil society or **civil institutions** refer to the totality of voluntary civic and social organizations or institutions that form the basis of a functioning society as opposed to the force backed structures of a state (regardless of that state's political system).
While there are myriad definitions of *civil society*, the London School of Economics Centre for Civil Society working definition is illustrative: -
"Civil society refers to the arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes, and values. In theory, its institutional forms are distinct from those of the state, family, and market, though in practice, the boundaries between state, civil society, family, and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated. Civil society commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors, and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy, and power. Civil societies are often populated by organisations such as registered charities, development non-governmental organisations, community groups, women's organisations, faith-based organisations, professional associations, trades unions, self-help groups, social movements, business associations, coalitions and advocacy group."

Civil society organisations, particularly those in the social change sector, are strong proponents of the public sphere, and frequently make public policy discussion and public education major parts of their missions. They seek to effect change through dialogue with others sharing an interest in a social concern. In recent years, the rise of the new communications technologies and the Internet has had a significant effect on public sphere communications. The rapid evolution of the Internet has led many civil society organisations to adopt different software tools and information dissemination techniques to enhance their strategic effectiveness for social change.

Role of the Individual in Social Change

Society has no direct means to give conscious expression to its subconscious collective aspirations and urges. That essential role is played by pioneering conscious individuals - visionary intellectuals, political leaders, entrepreneurs, artists and spiritual seekers who are inspired to express and achieve what the collective subconsciously aspires to and is prepared for. Where the aspiration and action of the leader do not reflect the will of the collective, it is ignored or rejected. Where it gives expression to a deeply felt collective urge, it is endorsed, imitated, supported, and systematically propagated. This is most evident at times of war, social revolution, or communal conflict.

For example, India's early freedom fighters consciously advocated the goal of freedom from British rule long before that goal had become a felt aspiration of the masses. The leaders spent decades urging a reluctant population to conceive of itself as a free nation and to aspire to achieve that dream. When finally the collective endorsed this conception, no foreign nation had the power to impose its will on the Indian people.

All human creative processes release and harness human energy and convert it into results. The process of skill formation involves acquiring mastery over our physical-nervous energies so that we can direct our physical movements in a precisely controlled

manner. In the absence of skill, physical movements are clumsy, inefficient, and unproductive, like the stumbling efforts of a child learning to walk. Whilst the energies are the motivating force, it is strategic ability and professional skills that turn energy into effective action. Often the high emotions of social change movements are a facet of this undirected energy.

Development occurs when the subconscious preparedness of society leads to the generation of new ideas and conscious initiatives by individuals. The accumulated surplus energy of society releases the initiative of *pioneers* who apply new ideas, acquire new skills and introduce new types of activities. Imitation of successful pioneers eventually attracts the attention and overcomes the resistance of conservative forces in society, leading the society to accept and embrace the new activity.

The potentials for development always far exceed the initiative of society to exploit them. The actual achievements of society depend on the measure that it is ready to actively respond to new opportunities and challenges. That response is the real determinant of development. Three fundamental conditions determine a society's level of preparedness: energy, awareness and aspiration.

Role of the Pioneer in Development

Social progress is stimulated by *pioneering individuals* who become conscious of new opportunities and initiate new behaviours and activities to take advantage of them. Pioneers are the lever or spearhead for collective advancement. Pioneers give conscious expression to the subconscious urges and readiness of society.

When society is subconsciously prepared for change, it still needs an agent through which to express this preparedness in action. In natural development, that is the role of pioneering individuals. Once society is prepared, sooner or later it gives rise to the initiative of one or more pioneering individuals who break out from the existing mould and attempt something new. Although exceptional and eccentric individuals may initiate new activities in any society, these activities usually disappear with the passing of their founder or give rise to isolated imitation that never acquires significant momentum. The social change pioneer is a conscious product of the society whose aspiration and initiative give expression to the subconscious aspiration of the society in which he lives.

Every new developmental activity is initially conceived and introduced by one or a few pioneers. The pioneer is one who sees, believes in and acts upon an opportunity that others fail to see or believe in, or lack the energy or courage to pursue. The pioneer exhibits a new understanding, new attitudes, new skills and behaviours different from those prevalent in the community at the time. If the pioneer's initiative is in tune with the social aspiration and social preparedness, it inspires and encourages other dynamic individuals to imitate or improve upon the new initiative.

Pioneers play a crucial role wherever a new activity needs to be seeded in the community for the first time. For example, the first teacher to leave salaried employment to establish a private language school, the first farmer to establish organic farming systems for new markets. Viewed from the perspective of the individual, it is the pioneer who initiates the collective/societal process. But viewed from the perspective of the society, it is the collective that expresses its intention and aspiration through the initiative of the pioneer.

The role of the pioneer is vital to social development, because the next stage of social progress almost always remains unseen by the collective. It is the free thinking, far seeking individual who dares to imagine or conceive what the popular mind is unaware of and then translates that vague possibility into a reality that all can see. By acquiring one new or different attribute or behaviour, he charts a new course and reveals a new possibility, all the time basing himself on the society's present accomplishments and in most cases moving in a direction that the society has already indicated.

Multiplier Effect

It does not really matter whether pioneers come forward on their own internal prompting or in response to an opportunity or demonstration created by government. In either case, the individual embodies and represents the social initiative. What does matter is the response of the society to the pioneer. Often the early pioneer meets with a response of indifference, resistance, contempt or hostility from the community around him, especially when his actions represent a radical departure from the status quo. This usually occurs when the pioneer comes too much before his time, before society is fully ready to act on its urge for something new. At other times the successful pioneer is actively admired and respected, yet no one else comes forward to imitate his success. In either case, the pioneer's initiative fails to catch on. If the pioneer pushes through change before the society is fully prepared, the change comes abruptly in the form of a revolution. If society is fully prepared to accept and follow the pioneer, then the change occurs by a smooth evolution. Revolution is premature evolution.

Under appropriate conditions, the success of the pioneer leads to active imitation by other adventurous individuals who in turn serve as models for still others to imitate. In this case, the initiative of the pioneer gets multiplied over and over, rippling through the society and unleashing a social change movement.

Conclusion

Human development is a function of human awareness, aspirations, attitudes and values. Like all human creative processes, it is a process of self-conception. As the writer, artist, composer, political visionary and businessman conceive of unrealised possibilities and pour forth their creative energies to give expression to them, the social collective evolves a conception of what it wants to become and by expressing its creative energies through myriad forms of activity seeks to transform its conception into social reality. The only major difference is that while the individual sometimes (but not always) is conscious of the conception he or she is trying to express, the society is usually (not always) unconscious of the idea and the urge that moves it to create something more out of its own latent potential.

Society is a subconscious living organism, which strives to survive, grow and develop. Individual members of society express conscious intention in their words and acts, but these are only surface expressions of deeper subconscious drives that move the society-at-large. The consciousness of a true collective organism is not merely the sum of its individual parts, but acquires its own identifiable character and personality.

This concept of development holds very important implications for the future of humanity and the prospects for progress in the next century. It suggests that there are no inherent limits either to the speed or to the extent of the development process, other than those imposed by the limitations of our thought, knowledge, and aspirations. If we change our

view, the character of this process can be transformed from the slow, trial and error subconscious process we have known in the past to a swift, sure leaping progress from height to greater height.

Further Resources

✍ *Web Sites*

Comprehensive Theory of Social Development
http://www.icpd.org/development_theory/comprehensive_theory_of_social_development.htm