



The Needs of People: *Whose Viewpoint?*¹

Ted Ward

Two equally wrong approaches exist in development:

- a) To bring about change without concern for the needs of people.
- b) To bring change based on outsiders' views of the needs of people

The gospel is able to speak to people in their context; and in my judgment, the work of missions should be less involved in trying to interpret the Scriptures in order to tell converts what they should do. Confront people with Jesus Christ and introduce them to the Word of God so that they might for themselves ask important questions of challenge. If that strategy were used we would have far less emphasis on the premature changing of social customs in societies where the gospel is beginning to move.

Historically missionaries have gone beyond the gospel in their decision-making in areas that should have been the concern of the church. The only sure ground for assessing need is the ground of relationship with God and that matter alone. Beyond that many things follow but they should all be a process of cooperative, participative involvement, not just of the outsider and the decision-maker. Perhaps the outsider in the prophet role: "Here is what God has said"; and the insider in terms of identifying the application of that truth to society.

Three contrasts in defining needs:

Needs vs Wants: Needs are basic; wants are temporary.

Intrinsic Needs vs Extrinsic or Acquired Needs: Intrinsic needs come from within the person; extrinsic derives from the consequences of societal factors.

Functional Needs vs Felt Needs: Felt needs are needs that a person is able to identify; functional needs are those the insider doesn't recognize. The outsider can often see these needs and they may become a source of oppression especially if they assert: "Don't deal with felt needs until the functional needs are met."

Social science divides needs into 3 categories:

Basic: Survival and security needs.

Social: Needs that are satisfied through giving and receiving. Satisfactions from others and satisfactions that come from giving.

Self-Actualized: The creative aspect of the human person needs to be fulfilled.

Erikson, while most commonly understood as a theory of human development, offers useful insight as a model of development for the developing world. He describes "conflict potentials" between two

¹ Ted Ward. The Needs of People—Whose Viewpoint? Presentations on Development and Development Assistance. Daystar University, Nairobi, Kenya, 1978

issues at each stage of development. Consider the following in light of community or national development.

The Stages:

Trust vs Mistrust.

Autonomy or self-initiative vs shame and doubt.

Initiative vs guilt. The person goes beyond the possibility of making a mistake and acts anyway.

Industry vs Inferiority. The effective use of one's time vs one who assumes that the product would not be worthy.

Identity vs role diffusion. People who have been in a position of inferiority or subservience, suddenly find themselves in a place of responsibility or role identity they have not yet clarified.

Intimacy vs Isolation. To be part of a community.

Generativity vs Stagnation. People (or communities) who have functioned for so long in one mode suddenly find themselves stagnating.

Ego Integrity vs Despair. I am worthwhile and this ego strength is enduring. People can lose ego integrity in retirement.

Two safe assumptions about needs:

- 1) Everyone has needs but the way they are met will be culture specific.
- 2) Needs look different to those who feel the need. Outsiders will have a different perception of other people's needs.

Viewpoints on needs:

The one who looks (outsiders) and one who feels (insiders). An outsider with wide experience and empathy can have a useful vision of people's needs. An outsider characterized by narrowness and ethnocentrism—a viewpoint that will be out of tune with the sense of need in *that* society. An ethnocentric person sees needs in others as a projection of himself or herself.

Insiders' viewpoints will range from oppression to liberation. A person who is oppressed will feel need in narrow terms. They often cannot identify needs because they are so far from fulfillment. The oppressed repress their sense of need so they can cope with it. A liberated person, even an underdeveloped liberated person, can describe his or her needs—often in terms of agenda. He or she can describe a priority of needs.

The depth of comprehension of the concept of needs:

Needs can be understood at three levels.

Level 1: Needs are things to be acquired, gaps to be filled. The emphasis is on the content or the substance of that which will meet the needs. The person thinks in terms of what can be given to people or what can be done for them. What is important in level 1 is the lack. We are interested in these people because they have these needs; they lack something. The operation in level 1 is to give something in order to meet the need. The self-perception of the development person at level 1 is that of a change agent.

Level 2: This is not a rejection of level 1 but a moving beyond it. Needs are assumed to be things to be resolved, conditions to be set right. Restoring balance is key. Meeting needs at this level may still involve acquisition but it is not defined in those terms. The fixation in level 2 is not on content but on needs. People in level 2 often don't talk about needs, they talk about what they are bringing to the situation. In level 2 people are consumed with talk about how needs will be met.

Level 3: sees needs as dynamic life processes—as life itself. The issue is not to get away from needs but to realize that life is a constant process of dealing with needs. Needs are part of life itself, and one begins to realize that life is a continuous process of meeting needs. Therefore, when we relate to the needs of people we are simply living. The fixation is on the dynamics of the situation. At this point, we want to be in a relationship that allows us to get into the life processes of the people and to be part of an action. We see people as those who are developing or who are stalemated in their development. We don't have to bring the process or the change; but we have to work with the process as it is unlocked from within.

The three levels have different fixations: (1) What do I have to offer? (2) What is going on that I can be part of? (3) Development may be working with communities in recognizing and removing limitations or inhibitions so that the process can get started again.

Many national aid projects are at level 2. The operation at level 3 is to reestablish, reopen and then maintain life processes. This is not starting something new but finding what is there. Developers see themselves as sharers in a walk. You join that walk by hearing the community say "Follow us, share with us." The community does not follow the developer; the developer joins the community.