



Development and Development Assistance: *An Explanation of Terms* (2000)

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In reference to missionary activity and mission strategy, *development* usually denotes an inclusive process in which the physical and social needs of people and groups are given attention alongside their spiritual needs.

Development is a general word, commonly used in reference to such diverse matters as fund-raising, improvement of property or resources, increased effectiveness and profitability of a business or social enterprise, expansion and fulfillment of complex mental capacities, physical maturation—especially of children, and spiritual deepening across a lifetime.

Developmentalism, a closely related term in the field of psychology and social psychology, emphasizes the built-in characteristics of the organism, the person, or the social enterprise. *Developmentalism* does not deny the influences of environment, but it avoids assuming that the environment or any outside agents are the singular explanation for all outcomes in the development of a person or of a society. From a developmental perspective, *development* is defined in terms of the processes through which maturing persons or emergent societies lose the limitations that have characterized their previous condition.

The major obstacles to social development include 1) *defeatism*, in which people see no possibilities beyond the conditions and restrictiveness with which they are currently most familiar, 2) *dependency*, an actual condition or a mental state in which people assume that they are not adequate part from significant help and resources from the outside, and 3) *pride*, through which people become self-sufficient and resistant to encouragements and assistance from outsiders.

The role of the outsider, whether teacher, parent, missionary, agriculturalist, or health worker, is a matter of assisting, stimulating, encouraging, and providing access to the resources essential to development. Thus, such outsiders could be better described as development assistance workers rather than as developers, or even as development technicians. The activity in which outsiders provide valuable services within contemporary church ministries and evangelism in many places is *development assistance*.

Development assistance has become an increasing emphasis within missions in recent years. Although the concern for the well-being of human beings has been a facet of deliberate Christian missions all through the modern missionary era, conservative and narrow views of missions took a toll during the middle of the twentieth century. Defining missions as verbal proclamation of the Gospel makes people more enthusiastic about building schools than about building hospitals. Since development assistance is usually a slow, responsive, and rather costly investment in people, the threat to other missionary activity has created a substantial schism. For evangelicals and conservatives, especially for

fundamentalists, meeting spiritual needs is arguably more important than attending to physical or socio-political matters.

In missiological debates, *development assistance* often is seen as competing for resources that would otherwise be invested in spiritual matters, especially verbal evangelization. The argument usually springs from the fear that if resources are committed to the purposes of social development the emphasis on verbal proclamation of the Gospel will suffer. Some have argued that this position is based on the curious assumption that God's capacities and resources are limited.

Another argument against expending Christian resources for physical, social and economic development is based upon the view that the primary task of God's people is to act upon Christ's primary motive: "to seek and to save . . . the lost." This position arises from the view that God is honored as his people use resources wisely and in a manner disciplined to the priorities of the Kingdom of God. The conclusion one reaches will depend on how these priorities are understood.

Whatever the argument against the church's participation in development assistance, the example provided by Jesus Christ's engagement in whole-person ministry stands clearly as the most valid precedent. Strategically, as well, current evidence in the field strongly suggests that large-scale evangelization of communities and large extended families often follows closely the providing of development assistance provided in the name of Jesus Christ. This recognition has led to yet another view: legitimization of development assistance because of its pragmatic value as a tool of evangelization.

Although parachurch organizations such as Food for the Hungry and World Vision have emerged largely to balance the church's mid-century denial of the importance of the physical and social needs of people, especially the poor in underdeveloped regions, there is still no consensus on the place of development assistance within Christian missions.

The local church, as a community of faith, is an especially appropriate context for community development. In regions where the church is well-planted, participation of Christians in the social welfare of their communities often provides the incentive and motivational core for substantial development process. Thus the churches of the world are increasingly providing the leadership and community resource-centers for social change.

Relief activities are substantially different from development assistance. Although relief is a more common response to human need and is widely supported by Christians as a reflection of Jesus' teaching about the contrast between *sheep* and *goats* in Matthew 25 and his teaching about responsibilities to one's *neighbor* in the "good Samaritan" story, *relief* tends toward counter-developmental interventions and outcomes. Necessary as it is to save lives and to reduce suffering, delivering food and medical supplies can soon lead to a dependent condition, especially if delivered overmuch or overlong. The tendency to think of development as a sort of companion of relief often leads to confusion. Indeed, it is easier to solicit funds and elicit sympathy for relief needs, but relief rarely leads to making the necessary changes in socio-political structure, productivity, lifestyle, and culture. A Chinese proverb is used to sum up this problem: *Give a man a fish and he eats today; teach a man to fish and he eats for a lifetime.*

Development assistance requires participation of those being assisted. The one who assists must first listen and learn, resisting the temptation to exert undue influence through one's expertise and outside

leverage. Development assistance requires great patience and appropriate creativity. The primary goal is to encourage people to accept the possibility of bettering their conditions through self-help.

The major obstacle to effective *development assistance* is the difficulty of bringing into harmony the motives of insiders and outsiders. Views of the appropriate conditions of life, degrees of willingness to accept change, personal and community dignity and pride all must be considered. Who decides what goals are worthy? Who decides how hard and how fast to work? Who decides the best use of resources? Ordinarily, the *perverted golden rule* prevails: *Those who hold the gold make the rules*. The influence of well-intentioned outsiders, while important in the short-run, commonly becomes the undermining destructive force in many development projects.

Another common obstacle is disagreement on the scope of the problem being addressed by the development effort; even as Mother Theresa of Calcutta was persistently criticized for not addressing the underlying socio-political problems that produce India's poverty. Instead, she defined her mission in terms of treating symptoms, not causes. Arguments about how large to draw the target can cause development activities to bypass the most basic of human needs: the need to be directly involved in the quest for development.

In recent years the emphasis on *development* has waned among missionary efforts and in regard to international assistance in general. The results of development activity have been uneven and often disappointing; particularly among those who describe themselves as "doing development" and, worse yet, "delivering development," effectiveness typically has been minimal. Human groups simply cannot be pushed into development by outside efforts. Broad-scale community participation and altruistic local initiatives are essential, and they must arise out of what Paulo Freire called *conscientization*, more thoughtful awareness of the conditions in which people find themselves, coupled with a heightened sense of moral responsibility and initiative.

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