Editorial

The management of policy making and implementation: Conceptualising development

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"The manager is the man who decides among alternative choices. He must decide which choice he believes will lead to a certain desired objective or set of objectives. But his decision is not an abstract one, because it creates a type of reality", so wrote C. West Churchman [2, p. 17]. Neither, of course, is this decision objective and value-free. In fact, the decisions made, and the types of realities created by them, are liable to depend on the manager's own reality, whether he acknowledges that fact or not. Among the tricky aspects of a manager's reality are his assumptions – not those that are explicitly formulated, but those that Gouldner called "background assumptions" [5]. These assumptions are usually taken for granted, yet they decisively affect a manager's choices, especially inasmuch as they determine the perspective from which a problem or situation is viewed.

This point has far-reaching implications for the management of development. Today, much policy making in the development area fails to make it to implementation. Why? Because it is based on certain unacknowledged background assumptions, through which policy makers create a kind of reality that is out of touch with, or too far removed from, the experienced reality of those on whom the policies and decisions impinge. The difficulties may become apparent at the implementation stage, when policy objectives meet with opposition or disbelief. Or when it becomes clear that harmful consequences are associated with their implementation. Or, again, even at the formulation stage, when the failure to conceptualise the experienced reality of development thwarts

the inclusion of implementation as part of the policy formulation process.

Two assumptions, in particular, often lurk in the background of policy making for development. The first assumption is that development is a matter of attaining certain *levels* (for instance, reaching a minimum level of per capita Gross National Product). This assumption has a long history and lies at the basis of the earlier monolithic indices of development, such as the GNP, as well as the more recent composite measures such as the Human Development Index (which takes into account education levels, longevity, as well as GNP) [9]. The second assumption is that development is primarily a *material* (e.g., economic) issue. Two practical results stem from these assumptions: (1) the management of development is viewed as a *macroeconomic* concern, and (2) international *comparisons* serve to evaluate performance. It is time, however, to shake off both these simplifying assumptions. Not only do they not hold up against the complexity of development, they may also help to defeat the purpose of development itself. For example, a macroeconomically healthy country is not necessarily linked to the eradication of poverty or excessive inequality. More specifically, the attainment of a certain level of GNP, education, or health care does not guarantee the reduction of violence, the sustenance of creative intelligence and constructive social dialogue, or the implementation of policies that engage values generally recognized as vitally important [4]. Moreover, by making development the object of international comparisons rather than an issue in and of itself, imitation rather than management is encouraged. The reality of development forces us to see that, contrary to these assumptions, development is an *ongoing process* (rather than a matter of levels to be attained) – one that is *multi-dimensional* in nature and,

specifically, a conceptual and social process as well as a material and economic process. Let us examine these realities of development and their implications, particularly, the critical role of management in facilitating development processes and the need to include the mind in the development picture.

1. Development is an ongoing process

That development is a process, which implies forward movement, does not tell us much about the scope and history of the movement or its finality. Yet when development is viewed as "unwrapping" – a nuance implied in the origin of the word – a notion of finality emerges. There is a deepening of understanding; a moving towards the essence of what people are and are capable of being, in other words, of their coming into their own. Presumably, this is what underlies the oft-cited statement: "development is for people". But this movement is characterized by change as well as continuity. In particular, change is embedded in a historical and cultural matrix which, itself, depends on and interacts with individual changes. Furthermore, both individual development and the evolution of societies indicate that this process of unwrapping is uneven and that, contrary to the illusion reinforced by figures of increase and decrease, it is also nonlinear. The driving force behind this process – already extensively explored by psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists – can be described as the self-renewing and shifting configuration of needs and aspirations. At the basis of these lie the motivation and ability to do something about one's needs and aspirations, which some psychologists have called *mastery*, *control*, and *competence* [8,10]. Surely people's insistence that they control their own destinies, and their ambivalent resistance to interference and outside help can be apprehended in this light. Indeed, these behaviours and attitudes suggest that the process of development is need-driven and that its goals can only be controlled from the outside at the peril of compromising continuity.

2. Development is a multi-dimensional occurrence

Certainly, as a process, development is conceptual and social as well as material and economic. Indeed, if it is a process driven by a changing set of needs and aspirations, then we must understand them in their complexity. Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs provides one such framework through which the diversity of human needs can be apprehended. While we can object to the hierarchical order and the number of needs contained in the theory, and while it is true that the motivational saliency and behavioural expressions of these needs may be culturally specific (see, for instance, [6]), the framework is still valid. For one thing, it contributes to the awareness that there are certain needs – such as the need for proper food, hygiene, and shelter; the need for a sense of security, belonging and self-esteem; and the need for an affirmation of self and the use of one's talents and abilities – which constitute a universal basis for the human sense of dignity. It also underlines that, without a process capacity to move towards fulfilling these needs, either illness or violence are distinct possibilities. But beyond this insight – which has been elaborated upon and extended by many others – the psychology of human motivation provides ample evidence that development encompasses the desire and ability to use the mind (for example, to represent and think), and to relate to others, just as much as the desire to exchange material goods.

What do these observations imply for the management of development? The reality of development is everywhere more complex than we might like. Yet the wish to simplify that complexity leads more often than not to serious policy failures. Management is all about making conscious decisions (as opposed to, say, behaving thoughtlessly or recklessly) and, while there is nothing inherently wrong with simplifying decision making, nothing justifies simplifying reality. Undoubtedly, some kind of development will proceed – whether or not it is deliberately managed. It is far from clear, however, that the human condition – and the capacity of humans to exercise judgment – would be furthered if development were left to its own devices. The potential contribution of management is certainly to ensure that development proceeds with more *awareness* as to the nature of the desirable objectives and the ways of achieving them. But another aspect of its contribution is that, through this awareness and the valuation of consequences, *learning* becomes possible. Learning here refers not only to an increasing technical knowledge but, more importantly, to an ever deepening realisation of values.

The real challenge of the management of development then is how to translate needs and aspirations into objectives; and how to facilitate the processes that may lead to them, while keeping the objectives

open enough to adapt to changing needs. The task for development management, therefore, is to *conceptualise development*; that is, to understand its nature, not merely from a macroeconomic point of view but from the point of view of the multi-dimensional processes that constitute development in the experience of those who are implicated therein. This means that the management of development requires *deep thinking* as well as the identifying and facilitating of those *processes* that are supportive of development. Deep thinking – which is conceptualising with implementation in mind – is not abstract thinking; nor does it seek merely to accumulate factual knowledge. Rather, it is a form of thinking which goes beyond assumptions and unwraps the terms and concepts we use and the meanings we attach to them, in order to find their deep resonance in our motivational considerations, needs and aspirations, feelings and values. Concepts such as good governance, civil administration reform, privatisation and capacity building mean very little unless they resonate, on the most fundamental level, with the feelings, values, needs and aspirations of the recipients, as well as with the aims of policy makers and managers. The latter can only go beyond their background assumptions if they become able to reach deeply into their own experienced reality, and thereby comprehend the experienced reality of others. Deep thinking means making that connection.

All of this has consequences for development counselling (often called development assistance or development cooperation). Ever since the Europeans "discovered" and explored stretches of Africa, South America, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific region, they have, implicitly or explicitly, adopted the role of counsellors in the management of development. This counselling has largely been counsellor-driven rather than "client-oriented", demanding the imitation of Western end-results rather than facilitating development processes. Not only does the imitation of end-results preclude the mastering of a process capacity, it also circumvents the assumption or ownership of actions and, thereby, corrodes motivation, initiative, and genuine entrepreneurship. Indeed, in the nineteenth century, at the peak of the exploration of the African continent, the European governments thought that technology should catalyse development, "end conflicts, bring scientific cultivation of the soil, and end the slave trade" [7, p. 308]. The late twentieth-century counsellors have emphasised that economic reform and democracy (elections) are the catalysts of choice for these desirable end-results. However, technology,

economic reform and democracy have not brought peace, viable economic structures, or freedom of expression; neither have they sufficiently nurtured creative intelligence. African leaders, themselves, are at a loss to explain why these results remain elusive (e.g., [1]). Even the traditional conflict between top-down and bottom-up approaches to development assistance wears thin when faced with the reality of development. From a more fundamental standpoint, this conflict is a mirage, entertained by opposing ideologies that tend to simplify decision making by, in effect, simplifying the complexity of needs and aspirations that constitute that reality.

Instead of simplifying the reality of development, the management of policy making and implementation should focus on re-conceptualising development on all levels through deep thinking and through facilitating and encouraging a process capacity that promotes inquiry, awareness and learning. Initiatives such as knowledge-intensive networking have dared to confront the necessity of, and the challenges inherent in, assisting process capacity directly; undoubtedly, there are others like them. Unfortunately, there and elsewhere, the neglect of conceptualisation through deep thinking, by leaving out one dimension of the equation, compromises the implementation of policies. The resulting separation of policy formulation from the management of implementation becomes symptomatic of the careless separation of concepts from experienced reality; of action and social process from intellectual comprehension; and of management itself from its connection with needs and aspirations, feelings and values. To accomplish this re-conceptualisation, then, the most urgent task for managers of policy formulation and implementation is not merely to multiply concepts and factual knowledge but to learn to integrate these and connect them with their own experience. Only then can the reality created by the policy maker or manager come close enough to the experienced reality of development to make implementation conceivable.

References

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