

*Who is this singer of touching verse
Burning with passion, dispelling sadness?
His sweetest songs disturb the wise
And fill their learned minds with madness.*

— Iqbal

Section Two: Soaring Above Entrenched Frameworks

Exposing ‘Sustainable Development’ Rhetoric to Make Way for Learning Societies

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For most educationists and educators around the world, ‘Development’ is considered a desirable goal, a positive process and a progressive stage that every human being (and every nation) dreams of achieving. It stands on an unquestioned pedestal — both as a process and as a goal — and, from this vantage point, justifies any amount of difficulty, distress, or destruction as ‘growing pains’. As India’s first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, articulated over fifty years ago, “If you are to suffer, you should suffer in the interest of the nation.”¹ Today these words could be uttered by nearly any ‘developing’ country politician, by World Bank/IMF associates, or by CEOs of multinational companies (though they would perhaps change “in the interest of the nation” to “in the interest of the market economy”).

For example, today Nehru (reincarnated as the Government of Kenya) is speaking to villagers being displaced by the Sondu-Miriu hydroelectricity dam project in Western Kenya. Recently, Kenya has been facing a power crisis, owing to the failure of rains and depletion of water in its main dams, the primary source of power. Despite the plight of the villagers, the construction of the dam has escaped the public’s attention, mainly due to the fact that it is seen as a part of the solution to the country’s power problems. The middle class would rationalize: the villagers’ suffering is in the interest of the nation.

And Nehru (this time back as a multi-national company) is obviously speaking to residents of Kwale, a district in the Coast province in Kenya, who are about to be displaced by a multi-million dollar Titanium industry. Canada’s Tiomin Resources Inc., through its wholly-owned Kenyan subsidiary, Kenya Titanium Minerals Ltd., is proposing to develop titanium sand mines and a mineral processing plant, which will produce high grades of heavy minerals including rutile, ilmenite and zircon. It wants the residents of Kwale to sacrifice their ancestral homes for a yearly lease of a mere 2,000 Shillings per family (US \$25), in order for the industry to make some 50 billion shillings (over US \$640 million) in 14 years. Environmentalists have also pointed out that titanium mining involves the emission of acid, the poisoning of underground water, and the destruction of the coral reef. But never mind the exploitation and the environmental damage, it’s all in the interest of the nation!

In this article, we seek to expose the dominant model of Development (and its implementing agencies) as destructive, dehumanizing and neo-colonizing, and to demonstrate how recent calls for ‘sustainable development’ and its derivatives only promise more of the same. We endeavor to explain why the global enterprise of Development actually prevents the emergence of learning societies, in which common people are able to construct their own notions of progress and development. Learning societies promote deep learning processes of reflection, dialogue and action to create futures that are in harmony with notions of justice, love and interdependence. In this article, we will argue that Development (whether masquerading as Sustainable Development, the Global Village, Poverty Alleviation, the IT Revolution, or the African Renaissance) must be unequivocally rejected if learning societies are to emerge.

Exposing the Development Game

For the past five centuries, we in Africa have been repeatedly taught that we have benefited from colonization, development and (now) globalization, because our benevolent colonizers have instilled in us civilized manners, railroads, bureaucracies, English/French languages, legal system, multi-party democracies, etc.² But before we declare Development a great boon, it is necessary to explore the trade-offs in more detail.

The assessment of Development can be ascertained from the responses to one question: Who are the losers and who are the winners in the Development Game? The ever-widening gap between rich and poor nations — and rich and poor people — gives us one of the answers. Today, about 23% of the world's population possess 85% of the world's material income and resources, which means that the social majorities (77% of the population) must scramble for the remaining 15%.³ The 'bottom' 20% of the population holds less than 2% of this wealth. In many countries, over the past fifty years, incomes for families have plummeted, while the cost of living has increased.⁴ But not everyone is losing. Consider that in 1993, the average CEO's compensation (not including stock options) rose 30% to about US \$1.9 million; this occurred in 23 corporations that had each laid off more than 10,000 workers over the course of three years (Brecher and Costello 1998). For those who are not quantitatively inclined, we will endeavor to qualitatively expose the agenda of the Development Game along three dimensions: Development is destruction; Development is dehumanization; Development is neo-colonization.

Development is Destruction

The belief in an unlimited accumulation of wealth and uncurbed economic growth has made Development one of the most destructive weapons ever unleashed upon the earth. At the commencement of the Bretton Woods conference in 1944, Henry Morgenthau set the tone for what would serve as the mantra of modern economic development. He envisaged "the creation of a dynamic world economy in which the people of every nation will be able to realize their potentialities in peace and enjoy increasing the fruits of material progress on an earth infinitely blessed with natural riches... prosperity has no fixed limits."⁵ The Bretton Woods conference gave birth to two institutions to advance this mantra: the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. They have since been joined by a third ally: the World Trade Organization.

If the key to Development was greater production and consumption, then the key to faster and more efficient production was a wider and more vigorous application of certain forms of scientific and technical knowledge. Guided by this vision of Development, and aided by loans from 'developed' countries and the Bretton Woods institutions, the countries of the South embarked on a shameless process of industrialization, militarization and nation-building, often lumped under/hidden by the beautiful term 'modernization'. Such modernization extracted huge amounts of natural resources and re-organized traditional societies into economic machines. Where and when such re-organization was resisted, the project of modernization turned to genocide, so as to continue unimpeded in its intended objective.

In recent years however, there is growing awareness to the obvious fact that Nature's resources are not infinite, and that Development has played a major role in making them more finite and vulnerable. Through massive industrialization and extensive exploitation of natural resources, through pollution caused by toxic industrial products such as petro- and agro-chemicals, and through aggressive 'Green Revolution' policies and biotechnologies, Development has accelerated the destruction of rich ecosystems (air, forest, soil, and water degradation) and has contributed to the extinction of bio-diversity.

New and more diabolical threats to the atmosphere have further increased the complexity of the damage. Increased fossil fuel combustion by automobiles and industries and rapid rates of deforestation have led to the emission of high levels of greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide and chloro-fluorocarbons (CFCs). Global warming and severe damage to the ozone layer is the result. Six of the seven warmest years on record have all occurred since 1980, according to the Worldwatch Institute's 1992 report. Changing weather patterns and rising sea levels have produced a series of floods, droughts, hurricanes, and other 'natural' disasters. According to the same Worldwatch report, in the Northern hemisphere, the ozone layer is thinning twice as fast as scientists had calculated several years back; greatly increasing the likelihood of an epidemic of skin cancer and other related diseases.

The dangers of toxic materials — the residue of Development processes — have also been well documented. The Bhopal gas tragedy and the Chernobyl nuclear disaster perhaps best exemplify the effect of industrial toxic wastes on both human beings and the natural environment. Of course, today we can look forward to adding the Titanium industry in Kenya to this infamous list. Beyond these industrial ‘outputs’, the Third World further exacerbates their levels of toxicity by engaging in the global waste trade, taking in so-called Developed countries’ garbage in exchange for a reduction in debt or additional loans. Yet, despite the destruction it causes, the dumping of industrial toxic wastes in the Third World countries has long been seen as an economic imperative towards Development. In fact, some Third World leaders have foolishly commented that the “total ban on wastes is a ploy to stop economic growth in the garb of environmental concerns.”⁶ In 1992, Development as destruction prompted over 1600 senior scientists from around the world to come together and declare that “human beings and the natural world are on a collision course... They may so alter the living world that it will be unable to sustain life in the manner that we know.”⁷

Along with environmental devastation, one can examine Development as destruction from another angle: its annihilation of cultural diversities and social relations in an effort to forge a mono-culture. Uniformity (a.k.a. globalization) demands an annihilation of complex ways of interacting, organizing and knowing. Indeed, the race to converge upon ONE way of living has destroyed many intellectual and spiritual self-defense capacities to resist repressive frameworks. For example, Development has contributed to the extinction of languages, by replacing local languages with English, French, Spanish and other languages of the imperialist regimes (a trend that continues today, where imperialist languages are viewed as the most superior means of communication in education, bureaucracy, judiciary, and other State institutions). In Kenya, a class of young people who are not familiar with their mother tongues is fast emerging. From the onset, the emphasis in schooling is on English, and so local languages (and even sometimes the national language, Swahili) are seen as obstacles to producing a literate nation. It is very common to find that the speaking of local languages is banned in schools, as teachers endeavor to produce English speakers. Ironically, a large number of students leave school without ever being able to ‘properly’ communicate in English, while at the same time they find that they have been divorced from their indigenous languages. ‘Language-less’, they end up in an identity crisis, without a means for fully expressing or understanding themselves and changes in their environments.

Development is Dehumanization

By promoting institutional values and establishing debilitating forms of dependency on institutions, while at the same time legitimizing their dominance, Development places institutions above individuals and above humanity as a whole. Authoritarian Development institutions (such as the World Bank, WTO, and the IMF) — with their own sets of logic, laws, technologies, budgets and values — are not accountable to the social majorities, despite all of their rhetoric about democracy and decentralization (Budhoo 2000).

In addition, Development seeks to impose a monolithic, spiritless worldview upon all of humanity that is guided by the following dehumanizing principles:

- True efficiency is maximum productivity for each machine, each enterprise, and each human being;
- Science can solve all problems and reveal all there is to be known about man and the world;
- Human happiness consists of having the latest, the most powerful and comfortable products, and luxurious surroundings;
- Our responsibilities end with assuring our own welfare — which happily assures that of our country — and we should let the next generation fend for itself, as ours had to do;
- In this world, it is each person for himself, with the strongest and the most resourceful people earning rightful privileges;
- The real signs of progress are bigger cities with taller buildings, more and bigger factories, larger and more mechanized farms, more and bigger highways, and a greater selection of products in larger and more luxurious shopping centers.⁸

We are taught in schools and via the global media that these principles are to supersede all other human values, as well as all other conceptions of human existence, forms of social organization, and frameworks of the past and future.

To manifest these principles, we need to install and maintain the Development infrastructure — Western-style Democracy, Courts, Bureaucracies, Schools, Hospitals, Market Economies, etc. Of course, an entire technocracy is required to manage this infrastructure. These technocrats must be faithful to the above ‘divine’ principles at all costs. Although in the early stages of Development, these technocrats were foreign ‘experts’ called in to complete Development missions; of late, the attention has shifted to “building the capacity of locals”, who will follow and uphold these principles and maintain their operating infrastructures.

Development further degrades human beings by converting them into ‘human capital’ and their relationships into ‘social capital’. Intrinsic human talents and knowledge systems are turned into commodities to be traded on the global markets. This results in severe distortions. As Catherine Odora Hoppers (1998) argues, “This esteemed production of one-legged, one armed or one-eyed individuals unable to relate to other parts of themselves and to others as well as to life itself, so characteristic of industrial-oriented development, must be addressed and reversed.” Furthermore, in the name of Development, big companies use human beings in the South as ‘guinea pigs’. For example, firmly fixed on expanding their market bases and also intent on increasing revenue returns, pharmaceutical firms test the efficacy of their drugs on unsuspecting populations in the South in order to “gain a competitive advantage over their rivals.”⁹ At the same time, these companies have so little regard for the sacredness of human life that they deny people access to essential medicines, either by arbitrarily over-pricing them and/or ‘legally’ preventing the local production of life-saving drugs. In Africa, the huge profits made off of AIDS patients by pharmaceutical firms are a case in point.

In the age of Globalization, the role of human beings is no longer to produce, but to consume. In order for the already saturated global economy to sustain itself, it needs increasing levels of consumption. The real agenda of Development is thus to develop voracious appetites, a deep sense of insecurity, and selfish individualism, so that people can consume with no limits and no sense of social responsibility. As Neil Postman describes, “The engine of technological progress works most efficiently when people are considered not as children of God, but as consumers — that is to say, Markets.”¹⁰

To secure this consumerist disposition, and to reduce possibilities for any organized resistance, Development institutions continually force us to adopt artificial mono-identities, which negate the very essence of our humanity — our innate capacity to see things in their wholeness, in moral, emotional and intellectual dimensions. Such mono-identities are necessary for ‘effective governance’, as they cut off our natural communication with our conscience and spirit. As Berger and Luckmann (1995) describe, institutions usurp our natural tendencies through a process of reification; that is, they distance us from the world, from both our immediate environments and our selves. “Reification implies that human beings are capable of forgetting their own authorship of the human world.”¹¹ In other words, institutions try to ensure a collective amnesia, that human beings forget that the current ‘reality’ is man-made and that it can potentially be ‘un-made’.

In addition, the sacred space of self-consciousness and selfless action atrophies through a process of reification, as the individual disclaims responsibility for his/her immediate environment with phrases like, “I have no control in the matter, I have to act like this because of my position.”¹² Interpreted accordingly, the individual is actually saying, “I cannot think for myself, the institution thinks for me!” History has repeatedly shown us that such an attitude opens the door for the worst kinds of atrocities against life.

The adoption of mono-identities further strips us of spaces to express our kindness, compassion and cooperation and forces us to compete against our brothers and sisters. An example of this is the denigration of the concept of *Ubuntu* in African societies. This concept has, at its core, “a basic respect for human nature as a whole (one is a person through others) as well as compassion and concern for the interests of the collective.”¹³ *Ubuntu* guides African conceptions of nurturing the whole human being in spiritual, economic, social and intellectual spheres. It lays emphasis on collective development rather than self-centered pursuits and greedy accumulation of wealth. With the growth of the modern economy, consumerism, private ownership, individual ‘freedom’, etc., such feelings of collectivity have been abandoned, which has led to unprecedented rates of family disintegration and crime, loss of spiritualities and faiths, and the escalation of violence and militant nationalism.

For example, the aggressive competition for resources and for political representation within centralized structures has divided people along ethnic, religious and racial lines on a drastic scale.¹⁴ In Africa, in countries like Nigeria, Burundi, Sierra Leone, and Republic of Congo, years of massive exploitation by Development institutions have produced and perpetuated a condition of scarcity (in the tradition of their colonial predecessors). In this tense milieu, groups have divided themselves along narrow notions of identity, to first lobby and compete for, and then violently fight for dwindling resources and illusory power. These groups purchase their armaments from the very countries that preach Development for All. Such devastating so-called ethnically-based strife (in which thousands of people have died and are dying) is all the more tragic, when we understand that whoever 'wins' can look forward to being controlled by the World Bank or other Developed country governments. These vultures graciously swoop down in the aftermath, to 'help' Africans 'rebuild' their war-torn lives.

Development is Neo-Colonization

So that it can continue to extract local resources, to fill its insatiable need for fuel to drive it, Development institutions psychologically and technologically colonizes the social majorities of the world. This begins by measuring them against a global paradigm, which can be traced back to the colonial era, when non-Western cultures were viewed as 'primitive' and in need of 'civilization'. Progress in the South is thus articulated as 'catching up' or 'narrowing the gap' to the North — in both the economic and the cultural sense. From this perverse vantagepoint, success or empowerment is achieved when one's country and peoples have become more dependent on and manipulate-able by forces beyond their control. A whole range of new global instruments (patents, trade agreements, tariffs, conditionalities, etc.) has been unleashed on the South to further exploit, pillage, subjugate, control and colonize. In recent years, an intricate network of information and communication has enabled these instruments to work with reckless speed and efficiency.

The extent of economic colonization is fairly obvious to those who wish to open their eyes to what's happening. Consider the following example. From 1982 to 1990, total resources flowing from the North to the South were \$927 billion in loans and aid. In the same period, the poor South paid the rich North over \$1345 billion in debt service alone.¹⁵ This figure would be even greater if one was to factor in the loss of fair prices for agricultural produce, due to unequal terms of trade. Developing countries must integrate in and abide by the rules of the economic game (like the policies imposed by structural adjustment programs and intellectual property laws); or else they are condemned to a marginalized existence and persecuted as 'Rogue States'.¹⁶

In Africa's case, entire social-political-economic fabrics have been ripped into pieces. Africa's current institutions therefore not only owe their very existence to the colonialist, but as such, are extremely vulnerable to neo-colonial control and domination. 'Integration' into the global economy has trapped Africans in a vicious cycle of producing what they can't consume and consuming what they don't produce. The world capitalist economy has taken over African traditional modes of production by "violently turning various communities, their lands, resources and products into commodities...[compelling] them to grow only those crops that possess exchange value [in the global markets]."¹⁷ Production for global markets has meant that food crops, such as maize, potatoes, beans and cassava, have had to be abandoned to make way for capital intensive cash crops, such as coffee, sugarcane and cashew. The result is a drastic reduction in per capita food production, leading to imports of the same and leaving local economies and local farmers extremely vulnerable.

Consider Rwanda, which provides a spectacular example of the genocide that emerges from re-colonization. Rwanda was heavily dependent on export earnings from the cash crop, coffee. In 1989, the price of coffee plummeted by more than 50% because of a deadlock in the International Coffee Agreement. This meant that Rwanda's export earnings declined by 50% between 1987 and 1991. Because of its inability to service its debt, the World Bank-IMF imposed a program of structural adjustment on Rwanda. They devalued Rwanda's currency twice in two years, the first time by 50%. In the same period, from 1985 to 1992, Rwanda's outstanding external debt increased by over 135%. The crisis of the coffee economy also impacted the production of food crops, like cassava, beans and sorghum, as the savings and loan cooperatives of small farmers disintegrated. Local markets were further destabilized with the entry of cheap food imports and food aid from rich countries, because of structural adjustment liberalization and deregulation policies.¹⁸ What can be surmised from the Rwandan example is how Development flagrantly tears apart local economies and drives human beings into involuntary hostage situations, panic and devastating civil war.

The absurdity of Development's zero-sum game is obvious when one reflects upon the 'race to the bottom' undergone by African countries. "In the 1980s, Africa lost the self-sufficiency in food production that it enjoyed before development assistance was invented and, during the last few decades, has become a continent-size beggar, hopelessly dependent on the largesse of outsiders."¹⁹ Indeed, over the last forty years, African governments have begged for cash, consultants and contraptions from the West. Our leaders have readily relinquished their social and moral responsibilities and have been institutionalized into either servitude or depravity (or both). Sadly, many African 'educated' people cannot imagine life without 'aid' from the donors. They have lost faith in their own intellectual and moral capacities.

This kind of psychological colonization extends into socio-cultural spheres as well. If one wants to get a clear picture of how psycho-cultural colonization is taking place throughout Africa, the best place to look is in the 'entertainment' field. How are Kenyans, for example, amusing themselves?²⁰ Over 95% of television programming in Kenya is foreign. None of Nairobi's cinema houses show African movies. They all show Hollywood products (with the exception of a few which run Indian films mainly targeted at Nairobi's sizeable Indian community). It seems that American pop icons and movie stars have come to represent the ideal of many Kenyan youth today. In mainstream theatre, all major Kenyan productions are poor imitations of old English comedies, which bear little or no relevance to Kenya's social make-up or pressing societal concerns. At the same time, private 'independent' radio is growing; with a reach of over 90% of households in Kenya, it is of strategic importance to advertisers. Almost each and every radio program is sponsored by corporate interests, so that after two or three minutes, we are told to buy something. Promotions by big companies, especially alcohol companies, and incentives in the form of prizes and gifts are always on offer: "Buy Two, Get One Free" has become a common slogan. And Kenyans, especially the young, are responding with consummate enthusiasm. Indeed, it is difficult to say what is not imported in Kenya. Ask the young what they prefer eating, and you will probably get responses of hamburgers, potato chips, etc. Designer labels of Tommy Hilfiger and Calvin Klein (American brands) scream from various articles of clothing. Foreign-produced televisions, electronic items, automobiles, etc. are all highly sought after basic needs. If it has a Western label, it is considered to be a product of superior quality.

In this way, under the 'benevolent' guise of globalization, the market has increased its reach into previously uncharted territories and fundamentally altered local consumption patterns. By successfully and very aggressively integrating people into predominantly Western consumer lifestyles, Development ensures that people are no longer connected by their communities but by the abstract culture of products, like Pepsi and Coca-Cola, Nike and Reebok. With such powerful thought-control in place, all exploitation of local cultures, natural resources, and belief systems can be easily rationalized as necessary in the grand march towards Progress. But despite the shift in dress, food and entertainment, most youth find themselves unable to attain the lifestyles hyped in music videos, movies and American soap operas. Neither part of the West nor part of their immediate environments, this 'educated' class of young men and women often seek refuge in drugs and criminal activities.²¹

Sustainable Human Development Promises More of the Same Game

As it dawned on people that Development was primarily concerned with economic growth and had been destructive, dehumanizing and re-colonizing, the desire to redefine development from a people-centered point of view emerged in the late 1980s. Sustainable Human Development replaced Development on the center stage. At first defining it as "a process of enlarging people's choices," the 1990 UNDP Human Development Report went on to highlight that the most critical choices were "to lead a long and healthy life, to be educated and to enjoy a decent standard of living." Sustainable human development was, on one hand, the improvement of human capacities (health and education) and, on the other hand, the use that people make of their acquired capabilities (for work or leisure). A number of proxies — life expectancy, literacy, income levels — were then set to evaluate the human dimension of economic development. Thus attempting to expand the framework of conventional Development, sustainable human development viewed GNP as necessary but not sufficient. Human beings were seen as the ultimate ends (not as the means, as in conventional Development), and better distribution of resources (rather than more production) was emphasized.

Yet "the beauty of the term 'sustainable development' is that it can be manipulated for any purpose."²² Since its inception, sustainable development has become a buzzword, adopted and co-opted by many institutions in various ways. For example, the World Bank states: "We require any technical proposal that we fund... has to be

economically and financially *sustainable* in terms of growth, capital maintenance, and efficient use of resources and investments. But it also has to be ecologically *sustainable*, and here we mean ecosystem integrity, carrying capacity, and conservation of natural resources, including bio-diversity.”²³ (Notably, the Bank chose not to answer the important moral questions related to whether infinite growth can really be achieved without either the destruction of the physical ecology or the marginalization of certain sections of society.)

With the righteousness of sustainable development and community participation behind them, the World Bank has vigorously pursued structural adjustment programs/loans (SAP/Ls) as the panacea to countries’ Development problems, especially for the growing debt crisis. SAP/Ls demand the privatization of state enterprises, an end to government subsidies, and the opening of Third World economies to foreign investments. In Africa, Ghana was touted as the ideal success story. SAP/Ls increased Ghana’s growth rate (5% a year), reduced its inflation (from an annual rate of 123% in 1983 to 18% in 1991) and erased US \$600 million in outstanding debt by 1990. This, of course, is only one side of the picture. The program’s bias towards incentives for export crops, especially cocoa, weakened local food production enough to make Ghana dependent on food imports. Some 50,000 workers lost their jobs due to huge cuts in the civil service, when IMF/World Bank required that the budget deficit be reduced. Import liberalization also led to the loss of hundreds of jobs in the textile industry and destroyed medium- and large-scale domestic manufacturing industries. In the same period, Ghana acquired an additional US \$1.8 billion in external debt, thus accumulating a grand total of US \$3.5 billion in debt. In fact, as a percentage of exports of goods and services, debt service rose from 31% in 1983 to 35% in 1990. “...If one were to sum up the Ghanaian structural experience, one would have to point to a contradictory process marked by weak growth, accompanied by widening poverty and a structural weakening of the economy... one would hardly call it a success story.”²⁴

The case of Ghana reflects what is happening all over the South. The tremendous contradiction between the rhetoric of sustainable human development and the policies pursued by governments, financial institutions and donors can no longer be ignored. Yet it is hard for us to rid Development of its ‘righteous’ connotations, especially because it manages to worm its way back into our lives, each time more chastened and purified! In the last ten years, calls for Sustainable Development have given way to the Global Village or to the IT Revolution. But despite the new camouflage, both are still colonizing phenomena, whose basic promise is the salvation of mankind via heightened consumerism or technology.

To legitimize itself further in the minds of Africans, the forces of global Development manufactured an even trendier phrase: the African Renaissance.²⁵ This ‘sell-out’ theme uncritically buys into many of the Enlightenment theories of the European Renaissance, such as progress, universality and rationality. Renaissance missionary-technocrats contend that Africa should fight for its share of an ever-receding pie and simultaneously pursue a policy of sustainable development. This is clearly demonstrated in their “charting-the-way-forward” themes, which deal with questions such as, “What are the structural conditions for *sustainable* socio-economic advancement in Africa to make the renaissance survive and succeed?” and “How can African education provide the necessary capacity and condition for *sustainable development* in Africa?”²⁶ These perspectives not only legitimize exploitation on a vast scale (700 million people, to be precise) but they also fail to question the wholly destructive model of Development. Instead, experts (i.e., Africans with Western degrees) are called in to propel the Renaissance agenda forward. They reinforce the stereotype of Africa as “the lost or dark continent” and assert that the antidote for Africa’s condition is an even more intensive internalization of western institutions and ideas. To make this bitter medicine easier to swallow, they provide some African cultural symbols and trite slogans.

Sustainable Human Development, the Global Village, the IT Revolution, African Renaissance: such mythical terminology highlight an inherent inability/unwillingness to challenge the underlying assumptions of Development, much less the way of living advocated by the Development model as a whole. The assumptions of what constitutes ‘the good life’ — money and consumer products to meet basic needs; votes in representative democracies; health care vis-à-vis Western medicine; literacy/schooling to obtain jobs — remain. When the economic and political institutions still promote destruction, dehumanization and neo-colonization, albeit with a ‘human face’, then it seems these new incarnations are no different from their predecessors: slavery, imperialism, and colonialism.

Making Way for Learning Societies

What is missing from the discourse on sustainable development, like what is missing in efforts to reform schools, is the questioning/challenging/creating of what ‘development’ means to the South and to larger humanity. Instead of

trying to reform Development by tinkering with it through patchwork reforms, we need to begin to seriously engage in processes of learning as de-institutionalization of Self and Community. From such processes, we will be able to regenerate our own indigenous options to unfold the paradigmic, structural, and systemic shifts necessary for learning societies.

Learning for De-institutionalizing Our Selves and Community

De-institutionalizing our Selves and our Communities begins with raising questions about the complexities, contradictions and injustices of Development, as we experience them in our daily lives. To discuss these questions in a meaningful way, we need to re-expand our notions of identity and break free of the constricting labels foisted upon us by Development institutions. We must engage with questions such as, “What does it mean to be a human being?” and “How do Development institutions kill inherent intellectual and spiritual abilities to realistically engage with our inner essences and establish vital connections with wider humanity?” We must open ourselves to honestly understanding the essence of human life, its purposes and aspirations. We need to find new ways to see, listen, feel and care, in order to heal the gaping wounds inflicted by colonialism and deepened by Development and Globalization. As individuals and societies engage in such processes of learning, they will uncover spaces and opportunities to acknowledge, interpret, problematize and act against the institutions, forces and practices that threaten to annihilate their individual, cultural, and ecological diversities.

Not only will such processes expose the destruction, dehumanization and neo-colonization of Development, but they also open up spaces for imagination, creative experimentation, active collaboration, and knowledge (re-) construction — the foundations of regeneration. From this angle, learning as de-institutionalization aims to liberate the spirits of discovery and innovation inherent in each and every human being. Simultaneously, it creates organic environments that honor our unique diversities, capacities and contexts and help us to resist the onslaught of a mechanical mono-culture.

Freeing our language to make new meanings, to enable new and relevant metaphors, narratives, and creative expressions to emerge, is one exciting example of regeneration that emerges from de-institutionalization. As noted earlier, a skewed education system (and monolithic language policy) has led to the production of a large number of youth, who are totally alienated from their traditional languages and who, at the same time, find themselves incompetent in using the institutional language of their schooling. This, however, has not meant that they have stopped communicating and interacting. The young people of Kenya, especially those in the urban areas, have over the years developed a unique language that combined elements of Swahili and other indigenous languages and also invented new words in the streets. This language, locally known as Sheng’, is providing the youth with a new medium of expression.

Although marginalized for years, amid accusations of being the language of ‘thugs’, ‘unschooled’ and ‘uncultured’, Sheng’ is gradually expanding its base in popular culture. Young musicians are starting to use Sheng’ as a medium of reaching out and articulating their frustrations with the systems. Although the forces of capitalism have been quick to see this potential, and the commercialization of Sheng’ is rapidly moving in, Sheng’s uniqueness is that it is a dynamic, constantly evolving language. This makes it hard to capture or even write, as it has no ‘custodians’ and does not abide by any rules. Every individual, every community adds to it, while ensuring that the sense of communication is not lost. Without undermining Kenya’s indigenous languages’ struggles against extinction, Sheng’ perhaps bears the most hope for the survival of our ORAL traditions at the national level.

Another example of regeneration that grows out of de-institutionalization is The Counter Renaissance. Breaking the boundaries of the nation-state, a group of African students in India and Kenya have started this trans-local publication.²⁷ They seek to raise questions about Development’s latest incarnation in Africa, the African Renaissance. The publication challenges the totalizing control of the mainstream media, as well as its assumptions, such as “Africa needs increased economic investment for Development”. The Counter Renaissance provides a space for African youth to question, reflect and generate shared visions of Africa’s future, as well as an safe atmosphere for unlearning Development’s dominant perspectives. Personal narratives, reflections on people’s own experiences and realities, form the core content of the publication.

Both of these examples make it clear that a fundamental prerequisite for learning is an appreciation of the diverse potentials and creativities inherent to each human being. When Development destroys local cultures, languages,

economies and capacities, it asphyxiates meaningful and diverse learning within our communities. At the same time, its dominant thinking demands us to learn to be exemplary (perpetually insecure) consumers, to learn how to aspire for institutional power and domination, to learn to fight for narrow interests of the individualistic/isolating self. To expose the Sustainable Human Development rhetoric and allow learning societies to unfold, we are going to have to unlearn these enslaving myths. A major challenge for us will be to unlearn our institutional dependency and to cure ourselves of the beggar syndrome.

Development is forcing us to forget what the larger struggle of human life is all about. We need to re-weave the thread that connects us as human beings and re-create the tapestry of spiritual, intellectual, and cultural relationships that form the basis of our families and communities. This can only happen if we re-establish our faith in each other and the power of the collective human spirit.

Endnotes

¹ Quoted in Arundhati Roy, The Greater Common Good, p.1.

² As Adam Smith once commented, “Africans are creatures at the level of a mere thing and object of no value.” His opinion was seconded by Friedrich Hegel who said, “Slavery has been the occasion of the increase of human feelings among Negroes... enabling them to become participants in a higher morality and the culture connected to it.” Quoted in Noam Chomsky, Year 501: The Conquest Continues (Cambridge: South End Press, 1993).

³ Although we have seen it quoted in a number of places, one source for this fascinating statistic is Makarand Paranjape, Decolonization and Development: Hind Svaraj Revisited, p.45.

⁴ See Jeremy Brecher and Tim Costello’s Global Village or Global Pillage (Cambridge: South End Press, 1998 ed.) which discusses how wages for workers worldwide are decreasing, as corporations keep moving to countries which have lower labor costs and less operating regulations. It is “a race to the bottom”.

⁵ Henry Morgenthau is quoted in David Korten, “The Failure of Bretton Woods,” in The Case Against the Global Economy, p.21.

⁶ Biswas in The Hindu Survey of the Environment, 1998, p.47.

⁷ Quoted in Duane Elgin and Coleen LeDrew, “Global Conscious Change: Indicators of an Emerging Paradigm,” <www.newhorizons.org/wwart_elgin2.html>

⁸ Selected bullet points from Ervin Laszlo, Inner Limits of Mankind, p.31-33.

⁹ Quoted from John le Carre, “Tinker, tailor people’s lives”, in the Hindustan Times, February 22, 2001.

¹⁰ Neil Postman, Technopoly, p.42.

¹¹ Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, “The Dehumanized World,” p.36.

¹² Ibid, p.38.

¹³ N. Barney Pityana, “The Renewal of African Moral Values,” p.144.

¹⁴ “Development not only exacerbates tensions but actually creates them...it causes artificial scarcity, which inevitably leads to greater competition... the inevitable result is alienation.” Quoted in Helena Norberg-Hodge, “The Pressure to Modernize and Globalize,” in The Case Against the Global Economy, p.45.

¹⁵ Srilata Swaminathan, “The Neo-Missionaries,” p.45.

¹⁶ Noam Chomsky defines a rogue state as “not simply a criminal state — but one that defies the orders of the powerful — who are, of course exempt.” In other words, rogue states are those that openly express their unwillingness to be dominated by the US or European states. See Rogue States (Cambridge: South End Press, 2000) for more information.

¹⁷ Sam Mbah and I.E. Igariwey, African Anarchism, p.41.

¹⁸ Michel Chossudovsky, “Economic Genocide in Rwanda,” in The Globalisation of Poverty, p.111-122.

¹⁹ Graham Hancock, Lords of Poverty, p.191-192.

²⁰ Charles has made the following observations in Nairobi and in other parts of Kenya as well.

²¹ For example, young men have joined groups of extortion (matatu touts) and terrorist wings of political parties (like Jeshi la Mzee and Chinkororo). Young women have entered prostitution to make ‘easy’ money.

²² Michael Maren, The Road to Hell: The Ravaging Effects of Foreign Aid and International Charity, p.47.

- ²³ Ismail Serageldin, Sustainability and the Wealth of Nations: First Steps in an Ongoing Journey, p.2-3.
- ²⁴ Walden Bello, et al, Dark Victory: The United States, Structural Adjustment and Global Poverty, p.46.
- ²⁵ In 1998, a group of 470 businessmen, politicians, academics and donors gathered together in South Africa for a conference on the African Renaissance. The book, African Renaissance: The New Struggle (1999), edited by Malegapuru William Makgoba, contains the proceedings of this conference.
- ²⁶ African Renaissance, p.ii. Emphasis ours.
- ²⁷ Available on <http://www.swaraj.org>; contact the authors for more information on The Counter-Renaissance.

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