

Extending Traditional Boundaries of the Development Paradigm

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Over the past decades there have been tremendous efforts, by practitioners and theorists alike, to extend the boundaries of development concepts and values to be more reflective of what actually constitutes individual and community progress. These efforts have attempted to define and measure progress in terms of such concepts as human capital, social capital, culture, social integration and community well being. The concept of spirituality and spiritual values, once almost a taboo in development, has found credence amongst development thinkers, as a key vehicle for social change, and is widely articulated in UN development deliberations.¹ Whilst acknowledged as important, the conceptualisation and measurement of spiritual development principles has only recently begun to factor in the analysis and the process of charting a new direction for the human family.

The challenge still remains as how to infuse spiritual principles into the understanding, practice, and assessment of development. This is not a new challenge but at the risk of oversimplifying things, I would suggest that this could occur by defining a vision of development and then identifying the principles that underlie that vision. To illustrate, let us consider a vision of a just, united and sustainable global civilisation underpinned by five principles that are fundamental to the realisation of such a future. At the core of these principles there is an understanding that human nature is fundamentally spiritual and material advancement is not an end in itself, but rather a vehicle for moral, spiritual, and social progress. The five principles are:²

1. Unity in diversity

The concept of unity in diversity is a way of expressing the principle of the oneness of humanity. Acceptance of this concept implies the development of a global consciousness in the individual, a sense of world citizenship, and a love for humanity as a whole. In this regard, each individual needs to understand that since the body of humankind is one and indivisible, each member of the human race is born into the world as a trust of the whole and so that the advantage of the part in a world society is best served by promoting the advantage of the whole.

2. Equity and justice

Equity is fairness, the standard by which each person and group is able to maximise the development of their latent capacities. Equity differs from absolute equality in that it does not dictate that all be treated in exactly the same way. While everyone is endowed with talents and abilities, the full development of these capacities may require different

approaches. It is equity that ensures that access and opportunity are fairly distributed so that this development might take place.

3. Equality of the sexes

The principle of the equality of sexes is fundamental to all realistic thinking about the future well being of the Earth and its people. It represents a truth about human nature that has waited largely unrecognised for a long period. Only as women are welcomed into full partnership in all fields of human endeavour will the moral and psychological climate be created in which peace can emerge and a just and united world civilisation develop and flourish.

4. Trustworthiness and moral leadership

Trustworthiness is at the heart of all constructive interaction and engagement of all human affairs. Whether it is at home, work, in the community or in business or political affairs, the security and stability of every affair depend on it. Those who wield authority bear a great responsibility to be worthy of public trust. Moral leadership, the leadership of the future, should find its highest expression in service to others and to the community as a whole.

5. Independent investigation of truth

The principle of independent investigation of truth implies overcoming a long tradition of imitation from forefathers. Spiritual development involves investigating truth for one's self. Continual reflection, based on experience in applying this truth, is critical to the process of spiritual development. In the quest for truth, science and religion - the two systems of knowledge available to humankind - must closely and continuously interact. For collective investigation of truth and group decision-making, consultation, which draws on the strength of the group and fosters unity of purpose and action, is indispensable.

The above principles can be applied directly to the development agenda (economic development, education, environmental stewardship, governance), standard setting, policy making, and constitute the very basis of spiritually based indicators. There is a real timeliness to develop indicators, which assess development progress as a function of the application of spiritual principles (some might call these cultural). I am not suggesting that the creation or acceptance of spiritual indicators should be the ultimate purpose or only objective of the development process but an integral consideration in recognition that the identification and tracking of prosperity are subjective and to a great extent culturally biased. This being the case our development efforts will continue to be dictated by mainly material considerations and true progress will prove to be illusory.

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