

STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

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Summary

This article briefly looks at the concept of human development, how it is measured, its inherent methodological and credibility problems, and the global performance of the concept during the past three decades. The key results that have so far been realized in Africa through the implementation of this new development approach are critically examined. Finally, the measures that African countries should adopt to foster an effective promotion of the concept in the continent are discussed.

1. Introduction

A welter of theories and strategies, which may be classified, into two groups, has backed the development of the economies of the world: the old and new theories/strategies. The first group of theories on development focused on economic growth and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita. This is generally taken to be a percentage change in the GDP of each nation-state measured in relation to the growth in population over a year.

In recent times however, many writers have questioned the role of economic growth as an indicator of development, especially because of its associated problems of waste, pollution, destruction of the environment, and the loss of freedom and security. Some even question the very concept of development as any thing more than a mirage that offers humanity nothing but, very literally, a dead end (Bratt, 1995). In the new millennium, the countries of the world, especially in Africa, will generally need more economic growth but more attention must be paid to its structure and quality.

2. Economic Growth in Africa

Economic growth in Africa has been said to be a complete failure. Sachs (1996) revealed that output per head fell 0.7% between 1978 and 1987, and 0.6% during 1987–1994. This failure is attributed to:

- The low initial income level of the African countries
- The extent of overall market orientation
- The national savings rate
- The geographic and resource structure of the economy

The UNDP (1996) also pointed out that although private investment flows to developing countries increased between 1970 and 1994 from US\$5 billion to US\$173 billion, three-quarters of this went to just ten countries, mostly in East and South-east Asia and Latin America. Countries elsewhere, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, have been left behind. We can therefore only but agree with Douthwaite (1996) that economic growth is a very indirect way of improving anything apart from the balance sheets of the companies responsible for such growth.

3. The Concept of Human Development (HD)

The failure of economic growth to induce development and the need to ensure that the results of growth are directed to supporting human development (HD), reducing poverty, protecting the environment and ensuring sustainability, led to the search for new development strategies, one of the most recent being the concept of human development, the successor of sustainable development. Numerous international conferences have examined this subject: the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, 1996 United Nations Habitat II Conference in Istanbul, the World Social Summits for Development at Copenhagen in 1975 and in Geneva in 2000, the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio, the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993, the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994. The UNDP (1996) sees human development as the end and economic growth as a means:

“The purpose of growth should be to enrich peoples’ lives. But far too often it does not”. Evidence also shows that there is no automatic link between growth and human development. And even when links are established, they may gradually be eroded— unless regularly fortified by skilful and intelligent policy management.

HD is people-centered development that looks at the capacities of populations to use resources in order to lead long lives, to be knowledgeable, and to have access to resources needed for a decent living. The concept underscores the fact that neither financial, economic nor material values can constitute the only base of the development process in any given society. As the UNDP stresses (UNDP Report, 1990), the real wealth of a nation is its people and the purpose of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy and creative lives. Basing development strategies on only economic growth is wrong for two main reasons.

First of all, the accumulation of wealth is not necessary for the fulfillment of some important human choices. In fact, individuals and societies make many choices that require no wealth at all. A society does not have to be rich to be able to afford democracy. A family does not have to be wealthy to respect the rights of each member. A nation does not have to be affluent to treat women and men equally. Valuable social and cultural traditions can be - and are - maintained at all levels of income. Barrat rightly points out that the richness of a culture can be largely independent of the people’s wealth.

“The people and all those things that make them what they are—their culture, values and interests— are never an obstacle to their own development. First, the task of development is to help people to move forward (by their own values) given all they are and not what they might become. Secondly, only what the people accept as the real or potential betterment of their lives can properly constitute their own development.” (Baratt 1995).

Secondly, human choices extend far beyond economic well-being. Human beings may want to be wealthy but they may also want to enjoy long and healthy lives, drink deep at the fountain of knowledge, participate freely in the life of the community, breathe fresh air and enjoy the simple pleasures of life in a clean physical environment and value the peace of mind that comes from security in their homes, in their jobs and in their society.

Human development therefore seeks to link people to the development process. It is a process of increasing people’s choices (UNDP, 1990). HD brings together the production and distribution of goods and services and the expansion and use of human capabilities. It also aims at making the process of development more democratic and participatory (UNDP, 1991). These choices include access to resources (employment and income opportunities) in order to ensure a long and decent life (a clean and safe physical environment) and education and knowledge. Members of every community should also have the opportunity to participate fully in its decision-making process and to enjoy human, economic and political freedoms.

The concept of HD was expanded in 1993 to include investing in human capabilities in order to make them more creative and productive. In other words, human development implies the development of the people for the people by the people (UNDP, 1993). The UNDP 1995 Report identified additional choices highly valued by many people to range from political, economic and social freedom to opportunities for being creative and productive and enjoying self-respect and guaranteed human rights. Four major in-built elements of HD are:

- Productivity: Everyone should be able to participate in development activities in a productive and efficient manner.
- Equality: People should get equal access to resources and equal choices.
- Sustainability: We have the moral obligation to do at least as well for our successor generations as our predecessors did for us.
- Empowerment: People should be able to participate in decision-making.

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Biographical Sketch

Emmanuel Kwesi Boon (1954) is an expert in Management and Environmental Management. He obtained his Bachelor of Arts in Economics and Geography from the University of Ghana in 1979. He also has a Master's Degree in Industrial Location and Development from the Free University of Brussels (VUB). After studying for an M.B.A. Degree from the University of Antwerp (UFSIA) in 1983, he earned a Ph.D. in Economic Sciences from the VUB in 1986. Currently, he lectures management studies at the School of Administration of University of Ghana in Accra and environmental management at the VUB.

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