

***Origins and Justification of Alternative Development
as an Ideology and Approach to Development.***

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Alternative Development as an expression of militant civil society is political to the core. Its politics asserts human rights and the particular rights of the citizens in given political communities, especially the rights of the people heretofore without voice, the disempowered poor, who constitute a majority.

Origin

The ideas for an alternative development took shape about 20 years ago over the course of successive meetings of an invisible college of international development specialist. Landmark meetings were the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment Program (UNEP) and the Cocoyoc seminar (Mexico) on “Pattern of Resource Use, Environment and Development Strategies”, convened in October 1974 at the behest of UNEP and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). Cocoyoc brought together experts all parts of the world and also brought together two major standpoints of the alternative development: those who had argued that priority attention should be given to satisfy the basic needs of people for food, water and shelter rather than to simple growth-maximization, and those who were concerned with the outer limits of the planet’s resources and its environment to sustain growth. A people centered development in harmony with the environment would require a more self-reliant effort than in the past. Although autarchy is clearly not what they had in mind, the signers of the Cocoyoc Declaration thought that self-reliance might imply “a temporary detachment from the present system”. They thought that “to develop self-reliance through full participation in a system that perpetuates economic dependence” would be impossible (Friedman, 1992).

In 1975, the Swedish Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation published a pamphlet with the provocative title “What Now? Another Development”. Mainstream model of development failed to address the question of mass poverty and sustainability. The Foundation advocated a humanist model of development through a ten-point programme.

In 1976, many of the participants in the earlier meetings and projects, as well as some new contributors, came together in the establishment of the International Foundation of Development Alternatives (IFAD) in Nyon, Switzerland. Their principal purpose was to launch the Third System Project. In its progress report, “Building Blocks for an alternative Development Strategy”, the Third

System Project took an innovative step by recognizing the different scales at which development occurs: local, national, global and somewhat ambiguously, “Third World”. Of these, local space was regarded as the most significant for “people’s creative unfolding”: ‘Development is lived by people where they are, where they live, learn, work, love, play and die. But the world was moving in quite another direction.

Things are not going to the Third System way. Though it was misunderstood in the West, China’s Cultural Revolution with its austere egalitarianism had served as an inspiration for many advocates of an alternative development. In 1979, China was setting out on a new course of modernization, accelerated growth and mixed economy, because their leaders proclaimed that a few should get rich even if the rest remained, temporarily at least, poor. In 1979 and 1980, the neoconservative revolution was on its way.

Throughout much of the seventies, Western Europe and the United States pumped enormous amounts of money into the economies of the then called Third World. These loans, a direct consequence of oil price increases by the OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries), gave the receiving countries a fleeting illusion of prosperity. Then the loans began to be called with the interest. This debt repayment and capital flight combined actually to create a new outflow of investment funds from poor to rich countries. The principal agency acting on behalf of credit institutions in the west is the IMF (International Monetary Fund). To qualify for loans, countries would have to carry out “Structural Adjustment Programmes” geared to the requirements of a recently rediscovered neoliberal economic doctrine. The principal provisions were – deregulation, privatization of government owned enterprise, elimination of tariff barriers to overseas import, measures to promote export production, devaluation of national currencies to cheapen exports, and getting market to work properly by removing subsidies and establishing the “correct” set of relative prices that would permit efficient long run growth. But, the outrage at austerity measures, particularly the withdrawal of consumer subsidies, coupled with rampant inflation, high unemployment and a decline in real wages, led to widespread urban unrest.

The search for an alternative development could easily have been overwhelmed by these events. But it wasn’t. In 1983 the United Nations General Assembly appointed the World Commission on Environment and Development “to propose long-term environmental strategies for achieving sustainable development by the year 2000 and beyond”. Now, the discussion focused on sustainability. About the same time, some Third System people decided to push for an alternative

development from outside established institutions. In 1984, they began to meet annually in the Other Economic Summit in where the international economic disorder, putting people first, in search of self-reliance, working like women, and local economic regeneration. Surprisingly, with a time lag of several years, their works were beginning to have some effect even on mainstream institutions, such as the World Bank, which by the 1990 had put poverty back on the development agenda and had created special concern on the environment and women. But by now the familiar neoliberal doctrine was carried over, if in a slightly less aggressive form, into the new decade.

Justification

Like the mainstream doctrine to which it stands in dialectical opposition, alternative is not primarily a set of technical prescriptions but an ideology. As such, it has a certain moral coherence. It also constitutes an immanent critique of the model in dominance. Under the sign of modernization, growth-maximization development strategies contain an inherent and perhaps fatal contradiction. The proponents of an alternative development question the assertion that “creative destruction” is inextricably linked to the story of human progress. They demand that the question of what furthers human life be examined on its own merits. If social and economic development means anything at all, it must mean a clear improvement in the conditions of life and livelihood of ordinary people. There is no intrinsic reason, moral or otherwise, why large numbers of people should be systematically excluded from development in the sense or even worse should become the unwitting victims of other people’s progress. People have an equal and fundamental right to better conditions of life and livelihood.

Alternative development cannot, of course, be the complete story. As an ideology, it argues for the rectification of existing imbalances in social, economic, and political power. Centered on people rather profits, it faces a profit-driven development as its dialectical other. Actual Development will always be the historical outcome of the ideological and political conflicts between them. What is the basis for claiming that every person is entitled both to adequate material conditions of life and to be a politically active subject in his or her own community? Such claims have three foundations: human rights, citizen rights, and human flourishing. The Universal declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1948. But the declaration does something more profound than establishing a legal system of protection. The assertion of human right tells us that there is a grave problem that must be addressed. Then the second point is Citizen Rights, and it is more straight forward. Citizen rights are specific to states and to conditions prevailing therein. They

presume the formal recognition of citizen status. Citizenship is categorical: one can't be half a citizen. The rights and duties of citizenship fall equally on all who can rightfully claim membership in a political community. But in some community such as women in Switzerland, Arabs in Israel, and the underclass in the United States may indeed be excluded from the practice of full citizenship. But their historical struggles have been to gain an equality of rights with citizens already confirmed in their rights and thus politically empowered. Their claim is for full citizenship de facto. The third ground for Alternative Development has called human flourishing. It asks to consider what it means to be a full human being living up to her or his capacity. It argues for the right to those social conditions, but general and specific, which make a human flourishing possible. An alternative development is therefore justified because, by improving the conditions of life and livelihood of the excluded majorities, it promises to further the self-development of human beings as individuals.

Strengths

Firstly, alternative development gives emphasis on people and environment rather than the products and profits. Alternative development being centered on the life spaces of civil society. Within the civil society, the household is core unit, composed of individuals who interact with each others, inside and outside the household. The interaction is spurred by and itself promotes numerous needs, wants and obligations. Many of these can not be satisfied by or expressed through goods available in the market or through provision by the state, although features of the market and the state may influence them. Instead of this, they must be aware about the context of civil society: basic psychological and social needs through complex human interaction. Alternative development approaches the issue of improvement in the condition of life and livelihood from a perspective of the household.

Secondly, alternative development involves in the process that seeks the empowerment of households and individual members through their involvement in social and political relevant actions by which rebalancing the structure of power in society by making state action more accountable, in the management of its own affairs, and making corporate business more socially responsible.

Thirdly, alternative development insists on the primacy of politics in the protection of people's interest, especially of the disempowered sectors, of women, and of future generations that are grounded in the life space of locality, region and nation.

Fourthly, alternative development is initially based in grassroots level and then to global.

Fifthly, it emphasizes the need to articulate the social valuations reflective in each community's life world with the abstract valuations of the markets.

Sixthly, it emphasizes that the right to inherit from us an environment in a condition at least no worse than that in which people received it. It includes the intergenerational equity or fairness in the distribution of environmental costs and benefits. It also respects the traditions of territorial communities

Lastly, for implementing the alternative development projects, it emphasizes on the local non-government organizations or some local voluntary organizations or people's organizations or community organizations.

Weaknesses

Firstly, it doesn't emphasis the external factors and also the process of globalization

Secondly, this theory is too optimistic and largely unable to provide rapid solutions to development problems.

Thirdly, it largely focused on the consumption needs of the poor rather than their production capability and their capacity to generate surplus.

Fourthly, it doesn't clearly define the indicators of the measure the level of empowerment of the people, as well as society.

Finally, alternative development defines the state as criminal, but in all cases the state is not criminal. As an example, Malaysia - their government can change the country's economic situation with the gender empowerment, sustainability and structural adjustment.