International Development: Beyond The White Paper

POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION: NORTH-SOUTH LINKS

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Last week the Guardian published an article by Simon Maxwell on Social Exclusion, North and South. The article coincided with the publication of the IDS Bulletin on the same topic. I urge you to read both. They reflect a welcome revival of interest in social policy and poverty analysis. There is a new understanding that dignity and self-respect are as important for people as are welfare safety nets. That is why *The Full Monty* has carried so much meaning and significance for cinema audiences all over the world.

The development cooperation community has committed itself to international development targets. To achieve these requires a vision of an equitable, just and inclusive global society. Today I shall propose four ways we can contribute to that vision. Let me start, however, by briefly discussing the concepts of North and South, poverty and social exclusion, and linking these to current thinking about inequality.

CONCEPTS

Firstly, North and South. These are helpful if conceived as metaphors. They are an improvement on 'developed and developing', terms predicated on a worn-out paradigm of modernisation. The collapse of Communism encouraged new thinking. At the same time, development practitioners began to notice that many characteristics of 'developing countries' were actually present in the 'developed world'. Oxfam started a programme in Britain; Christian Aid sent a delegation from West Bengal to Glasgow to undertake a poverty analysis. Last year DFID's social development advisers spent their annual conference visiting projects and programmes in the Midlands and were struck by the commonality of approaches between community-based approaches to poverty reduction in what we are now calling North and South.

Now to *poverty*, which I conceive as multi-dimensional. Inadequate consumption is a core dimension but many other features can be important. These include lack of assets and vulnerability to insecurity and shocks, ill-health, illiteracy, lack of access to basic services, social and physical isolation - and so on. I refer you to paragraph 19 in the Copenhagen Programme of Action for a comprehensive statement of the characteristics of poverty.

Social exclusion is one of three new frameworks for social development policy analysis which have emerged in the last couple of years, the others being social capital and a rights-based approach to development. All three are useful for giving us ways of thinking which demonstrate that poverty is multi-faceted and that priorities for policy need social as well as economic objectives.

Social exclusion has a number of different definitions, some of which are in fact re-statements of a multi-dimensional understanding of poverty. This Government's Social Exclusion Unit defines it as follows:

> *What can happen when individuals or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown. The challenge to tackle the interaction between these and preventing them arising in the first place.*

This appreciation of the interaction between the various elements is crucial. Missing is the idea of process with a focus on the dynamic causes and consequences, as well as the characteristics of poverty. Social exclusion is about institutions and actors.

The French, who originally invented the term, place a valuable emphasis on participation and social integration, thus contributing to our thinking about the nature of social citizenship. The relations between citizens, as well as between civil society and business, are as important for social policy as are the more traditionally conceived links between citizens and the state.

Along with the rights-based framework, the social exclusion framework includes a concern for inequality. Richard Wilkinson's paper in the IDS Bulletin, based on research in the North, shows a link between health status and inequality. People who feel good about themselves and their role and position in society tend to be more healthy. How they see themselves in relation to others influences their general well-being.

Michael Walton and Lionel Demery at the World Bank have also recently suggested that a direct effort to reduce inequality within a country can be an alternative policy choice for poverty reduction, compared to one which promotes high levels of growth and ignores inequalities. If policies for promoting social inclusion and reducing inequalities are one of the crucial elements to achieving global poverty elimination, how can development cooperation help ?

FOUR WAYS DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION CAN HELP

I suggest four ways in which development cooperation can help:

- Supporting Southern partner countries' efforts through bilateral and multilateral programmes.
- Contributing to the development of an international social policy framework to complement and regulate the global economy.
- Changing our own institutional behaviour to achieve partnerships based on principles of mutual respect, transparency and accountability.
- Encouraging and supporting the exchange of ideas, people and know-how, not just North to South or South to South, but also South to North.

SUPPORT TO PARTNER COUNTRIES IN THE SOUTH

We can help partner countries in their efforts to reduce social exclusion by:

Support to enabling policies and programmes: for example, helping partner governments establish and implement policies which remove barriers based on gender, disability, ethnic or other forms of discrimination. In Zimbabwe we are discussing with the government how we can support a training programme for the judiciary, as well as for civil society organisations, to ensure that everyone understands, applies and takes advantage of the new act which gives widows the right to inherit land.

Multilaterals play a key role at this level. The UK has been an active partner with the World Bank in encouraging development partner countries in the use of participatory poverty assessments (PPAs). A participatory poverty assessment is an instrument for including the perspectives of poor people in the analysis of poverty and the formulation of strategies to reduce it. In Ghana, for example, the government shifted to a greater emphasis on rural infrastructure because of poor people's emphasis on physical and social isolation.

Support to sustainable and inclusive basic services: National institutions in development partner countries can be helped to address the cross-sectoral equity and access issues in the implementation of sector-wide development approaches. In Tanzania and Zambia, for example, in our support to the education sector we are helping our partners find out more about the social and economic processes affecting the question of who goes to school and stays there and who is excluded.

Support to focused action which empowers poor people: for example, in our support to urban poverty projects we have found that delivery of accessible and relevant services cannot be achieved without strengthening community-based organisations so that poor people can demand the services which they

want.

Poverty-reducing projects can highlight key policy issues: in a rainfed farming project in western India, we funded a study on seasonal migration. We found that to help more poor people we had to shift towards a stronger and broader livelihoods focus, complementing our original farming system approach which was excluding too many from the project's benefits. This study of migration also highlighted issues for other poverty programmes in the sub-continent, including tuberculosis control and conditions of construction workers.

At all levels of intervention, we are *increasing our efforts to support Southern NGOs to represent and respond to the rights and needs of poor people*. This means addressing the social relationships that underlie poverty through practice, reflection and policy influence, developing long-term partnerships with governments, as well as other institutions of civil society, and engaging in advocacy on local, national and international issues.

Investment in the generation, dissemination and application of knowledge for social policy is crucial. Donors have until recently provided very little assistance in this field. However, there is no blueprint quick-fix solution which can easily be transferred to partner governments. We can help by providing access to available research and knowledge and by building an in-country capacity to help partners make more informed policy choices. We have just started a programme, through CDS, Swansea and SOAS, to help develop applied social policy research capacity in partner countries.

Tackling social exclusion requires research which is participatory and gives a voice to those we are seeking to help. We have found *Participatory Rural Appraisal* to be as successful in Russia as in India or Ghana.

People excluded from the mainstream of society are denied access to knowledge and information. They need the means and tools to find out what they decide they need to know. In the last year, we have been developing capacity in DFID to integrate communication issues into the programmes and projects we support.

DEVELOPMENT OF AN INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL POLICY FRAMEWORK

The UN conferences in the first half of this decade established a framework for an international social policy. Largely driven by the energy and concerns of an emerging global civil society, governments haggled and argued about equity and social justice. The resulting programmes of action have provided a set of principles which can be used as a bench-mark against which citizens can judge their governments' performance.

Ideas, information and networks are increasingly passing horizontally between civil society movements in the North and South. Social policy will become internationalised through the sheer necessity of moving beyond the nation state to achieve the regulation of the global economy. This will also entail an increasingly international dimension to the values of solidarity, social justice and equity. A global social policy requires a global moral community to lobby for it and stand behind it.

Development cooperation can help this process by supporting global, regional and local institutions, organisations and networks, both within and outside governments, to shape policy so that it brings benefits to poor people and communities.

Let me touch briefly on one example: the promotion of socially responsible business. We are all well aware of the risk that economically driven models of globalisation will run ahead of thinking and action needed to ensure that this process of change produces outcomes which are on balance good for people. Global governance is still in its infancy and some see large corporations becoming ever less regulated and more dominant in social and political spheres. However, a more positive picture is emerging: spurred on by ethical consumer pressure in the North and the need to manage risks in the South, many businesses are adopting ideas of corporate citizenship and social responsibility. Development cooperation can support

and facilitate this process by working in partnership not only with the private sector itself but with Ministries of Labour and Social Welfare, NGOs and trades unions, and multilateral agencies such as the ILO and the World Bank.

CHANGING OUR OWN BEHAVIOUR

A few moments ago, I spoke of a global moral community. Any functioning community requires trust, mutual respect and a commitment to nurturing relationships. One of the lessons we have learned over the last decade or so has been the importance of valuing and listening to diverse realities - of allowing for participation and empowerment as core values of all activities. This is not easy at a personal or an institutional level: it is extremely challenging to have to genuinely respond to the realities of others, particularly those of poor and powerless people.

A large element of achieving just and cohesive societies in the next twenty years or so will consist of simply making work better those institutions which deliver social policy outcomes. This means accessing knowledge and ideas from the broadest possible fields (and from all parts of the world), being reflexive (conscious of what we are doing and learning from our mistakes) and broadening the concept of accountability so that institutions share debates on goals and values with a wider range of internal and external stakeholders.

It is as important for ourselves as for our development partners. Majid Rahnema, a former UNDP Resident Representative, argues that the 'post-development era' should not be focused on merely operational or spectacular 'plans of action' or 'strategies'. It will represent a different age only if it is based on the cultivation of friendship and self-knowledge. (Rahnema, M., with Bawtree, V. (1997), *The Post-Development Reader*)

NORTH-SOUTH LINKS

Globalisation makes the world feel smaller yet also more diverse. We have a heightened sense of difference through greater knowledge and inter-connectedness of cultures and environments. We no longer lump countries together in a residual homogeneity of the 'developing world'. Identifying commonalities between them does not mean we assume that all societies are the same because everyone (except the poor and excluded) drink Coca Cola. It *does* mean being open to testing and adopting ideas and approaches, whatever their origin. Here is an example:

Perhaps the most common fault line for social exclusion is gender. A year or so ago, a colleague took our gender guidelines to a conference in Scotland where they were enthusiastically seized upon by someone from the Highlands and Islands Development Authority who remarked that this was exactly the kind of thing they had been looking for. Only last month, we were invited to give a seminar on gender mainstreaming at the Equal Opportunities Commission.

USAID has a programme called Lessons Without Borders. It is about bringing some of the experience from development practice to bear on some of America's pressing social problems and provides a chance to share experience from domestic and international programmes to find out what works best and to develop cost-effective approaches to similar problems. One example is a micro-finance programme for poor women in Baltimore, based on the Grameen Bank model.

Building support in the North for development in the South is reinforced when good ideas from the South can help improve the lives and well-being of those living in poverty and deprivation on our own doorsteps.

CONCLUSION

To conclude: Development cooperation has an important role in promoting the emergence of inclusive, cohesive societies. This essentially means societies where all social groups, regardless of ethnicity, regional origin, gender and class, feel that their interests and views are recognised and taken account of. Social cohesion is built through policies which promote economic equity, citizen participation, and social justice. Cohesive societies are less prone to conflict and provide a more stable environment for people to fulfil their potential. In contrast, processes of social exclusion - whether through increasing levels of

poverty or other forms of marginalisation - create an unstable environment in which the well-being of all may ultimately be threatened.

Let me end with two quotations which sum up the challenge. The first is extracts from a speech by a woman from the slums of Dhaka in Bangladesh, speking last year at a forum of community-based organisations to discuss their government's budget plans. Kulsum Begum said:

> *I hear that eighty per cent of people in our country are poor and the remaining twenty per cent rich... We the poor do not know much about the thing presented to us as the budget. Did anybody ever bother to tell us, the eighty per cent, what the budget is about and why at all this exercise is done? The answer is a big 'No!'... When it is time for school our children start crying. They say 'Mother, there goes the bell in the school. Children read there. We want to go to school. Why don't you get us admitted?' But alas, there is no place left for us in the school.*

And finally, Jim Wolfensohn in his address to the Board of Governors of the World Bank last September:

> *This is what the challenge of development is all about - inclusion. Bringing people into society who have never been part of it before.*

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