

What is Development?

What does the word development bring to mind? The latest cars, 'state of the art' technology, expressways, high rise buildings? These, no doubt, are indicators of material development but by themselves don't mean much. A nation which has these trappings of development but where the citizens have no access to basic human rights, where society does not foster values of equality, justice and so on can hardly be said to be developed regardless of how much technology it possesses. Development is thus more than just material acquisitions.

However, development has traditionally been measured in terms of material wealth, such as GDP (Gross Domestic Product). This actually measures the amount of money flowing through an economy, whether it contributes to a better quality of life or not (accidents and disasters are good for GDP as they generate expenditure). Money from logs, for example, is counted as part of a country's income, but the depreciation of the forest as a result is not calculated by GDP. Unpaid labour (e.g. volunteering, caring, bringing up children) is also left out, though some studies show that this represents 50% of all productive work in societies. More recently alternative measures of development have been created, such as the Human Development Index (HDI), the Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare (ISEW) and the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI).

The King of Bhutan measures Gross National Happiness as a measure of progress!

Some of the characteristics of development are:

1. Development is a process, an evolution, and not a one-time occurrence.
2. Development cannot be super-imposed by external forces. It is an internal process. For example, if a country purchases technology, infrastructure and know-how, it does not mean that the country can be called developed.
3. Development is not absolute and will mean different things to different people. For example, in India an important part of development is family planning to slow the rate of population increase, while in a Northern country with a declining population, measures to increase population growth may be considered.
4. Development is personal as well as national. The idea of the nation state is becoming increasingly questioned as more and more issues are looked at from different local, regional and global perspectives. Development starts with the individual, spiritually, morally and culturally and moves out to these wider contexts.

References