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DEVELOPMENT GOALS : THE VIEW FROM THE BOTTOM

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About the view from the bottom one should be modest, it is not for us at the top - governmental or inter-governmental bureaucrats managing flows of problems and conflicts, private or state capitalists managing flows of economic value and intellectuals/researchers of all kinds helping either - to tell those at the bottom what their needs are. To a large extent they know themselves, and to the extent they do not know they are like everyone else of us - uncertain, insecure, ambivalent, changing all the time, inconsistent; in short, human. We can probably safely assume that they want food, shelter and clothes and all the other things that are needed to survive, at least at the minimum material level. But I think we may equally safely assume that people at the bottom no more than people at the top want to be told what their needs are and how they shall be met; they might like to find out for themselves. Knowing how top-heavy our societies are, not to mention the world community as a whole, models of what to want and how to behave to get it are found everywhere, but above all in a tremendous pressure of communication beamed from the world's metropolises and larger cities to the rest, to the rural and urban poor, a message above all of material goods and a way to get them, through education and hard work, competition, geographical and social mobility, converting ones human resources into money at the labour market, and converting the money into goods at the super market. So they are told, indeed.

Hence, may one not safely assume that what the rural poor really want is to alter their living conditions in the direction of the urban rich, or at least the urban middle classes ? And should we then not, perhaps somewhat hypocritically, simply wash our hands and say "it would be paternal-

listic to deny them what they want"; using that sentence as one more source of legitimation for the expansion of our enormous non-governmental, governmental, inter-governmental, private and state machineries into all corners of the world, working for the day when a universal, above the minimum and below the maximum diet has been introduced all over the world, a world housing-corporation is supplying everybody with standard houses of a limited number of varieties, clothing is uniform and so is the medical treatment disbursed to that which is inside the clothes; not to mention the world's standard curricula at nursery, kindergarten, primary, secondary, tertiary, quaternary levels of education ? And on top of those basic needs some non-basic ones for those who are more worthy than the others ?

No doubt millions of the rural poor have behaved in a way that would confirm this scenario. The Macedonian poor who leaves for Croatia or Slovenia to work there as a Gastarbeiter, thereby releasing a Croatian or Slovenian rural poor who can go to the Fundesrepublik working there in the "Sanitation Department" of some big city (meaning handling garbage), thereby releasing a formerly German rural poor for work on an assembly line, thereby releasing a formerly German urban poor's son for work as a clerk, thereby releasing, etc.. You can start the chain in any peripheral rural village you want, and let it end at the top of our national and global polystructures. The pyramids and hierarchies are relatively well-known, narrow at the top and very broad at the bottom, there are lines of transmission, even some elevators for rapid upward mobility. But most channels are effectively clogged for the really destitute.

If movement in the channels that remain open is everything our world has to offer to its citizens we may be said to be in a poor state. For there are at least two important things to say about this image of what development means at the individual level : life at the top is not that attractive, and it is not that obvious that this is what those at the bottom really want. That many people behave as they do constitutes no proof. First, the model propagated by mass media and all kinds of demonstration effects is so strong,

so glittering, so overpowering that other models look pale relative to it. Many children in front of Christmas shopping windows will be attracted by the most colourful, brilliant, glittering, even if it is junk - and those who make the exhibitions know that. But second, although millions move maybe billions stay - and perhaps not only because they are not able to move; they may also not want it. And if they do not want, it may be not only because of fear of the unknown, but also because of a feeling of belongingness, of identity with what they have. And this is where it starts getting interesting. As a Norwegian I am reminded of the Norwegian farmers who in the struggle against the entry of Norway into the European Economic Community, so much wanted by top Norwegian bureaucrats and private and state capitalists, stated that " For us farming is more than a way of making money, it is a way of life " - meaning with this that they wanted to keep the Norwegian farms, small and irrational as many of them are, because this was the way of life they wanted to have. They had seen Oslo, found it a poor place, power-greedy, centralizing and not very much worth living and assumed that Bruxelles would be even worse. In this they may be right or wrong; that depends on one's image of ideal society: The point is only that these farmers did not want anybody to tell them what their needs were and what they thought of development, they knew. In fact, they even felt so strongly about it that the referendum was won against all the establishment forces in September 1972 and now, five years later, there seems to be a very wide-spread agreement in Norway that the people was wiser than the government.

So let us assume not that people are always wiser than governments, nor the opposite, but that the good society is the one that permits dialogue between the two and makes decisions that are flexible enough to reflect a large spectrum of images of development. The good society is probably the society that to a large extent trusts that people can find out for themselves, and makes the resources available. In all probability this points in the direction of societies with a very high level of local self-reliance,

meaning societies where the economic unit is relatively small and the economic cycles of course extend beyond the borders of the unit, but in such a way that in times of crisis one can survive.

There seem to be many examples of the rural poor who, when given the occasion, have burnt down the coffee bushes and other cash crops in order to use the soil to grow food that is edible . One would expect such phenomena to occur when the opportunity costs of growing cash crops are such that people actually suffer because resources are allocated in that direction: Using soil, capital, labour, fertilizer and water for cash crops is usually a way of extending the economic cycle and monetizing it so that the cash flow can be controlled by the top, possibly even end at the top, except for a tiny trickle. It is also, incidentally, a way of seeing to it that people in the countryside do not do what people in the cities fear most, in all countries, and throughout history; growing food for their own stomach only, leaving to the cities to feed themselves. In order for this not to happen the strategy of the cities is simple : either the carrot - method of producing and propagating goods that are available for cash only, or the stick-method of forcing people into a monetized economy by levying taxes that can only be paid in cash, by putting them into plantations that shade over into concentration camps, etc.

But there could also be another reason than hunger in the neighbourhood of the beautifully fertilized and watered cash crop fields : not to be reduced to some little pawn in the big game of private or state economic planning. It is easy to ask for solidarity with corporate or national goals when one sits in the centre of decision making, defining those very goals; the thing looks different from the bottom. Thus, one might simply like to be one's own goal-setter, not to be a part of a big scheme masterminded by somebody located in distant offices. To communicate the goals in the mass media even through the channels run by the corporations, the government or the party may not oil the machinery the way those at the top wish and think; it might even transform apathy into active resistance. Or, it may transform fundamentally diligent,

responsive and responsible people into professional cheaters who try to invent ways of milking the system at the expense of minimum effort on their side. A tractor driver in a planned economy who ploughs the fields on the basis of targets stipulated in the plan, in terms of acreage ploughed, is likely to cover much ground, but not very well; doing a poor job but getting away with it among other reasons because the inspector is likely to be rewarded for the number of fields inspected, not how thoroughly he inspects. The tractor driver may not be economically poor but for what ever he has of material riches the spiritual costs in terms of loss of identity with work, with work product, with nature, with other people, may be considerable. I would include him among the so-called "rural poor" because his work has been organized in such a way that he has all the disadvantages of modern industrial urban life, without any of the advantages - the advantages being urban services, a certain amount of freedom of choice in what to consume, the possibility of anonymity in some settings and togetherness with family and friends in others, etc.

Anyhow, at the same time as there is this desperate struggle against material and spiritual poverty and the sneaking suspicion that material growth is obtained at the expense of increasing spiritual poverty strange things are happening at the other end of the world hierarchies. Thus, it looks as if people for the first time in modern history are leaving cities in Italy and England more than they are entering. Obviously this phenomenon has to do with a general decline, economically speaking, of these two countries. It is certainly not unwise if a real economic squeeze is coming, to be able to be more self-reliant, even self-sufficient where food is concerned, being close to a piece of ground where edible crops can be grown.

But the phenomenon certainly has deeper roots : the quest for non-material values left unsatisfied in cities, presumably more satisfiable in more communal patterns of living, closer to our base, namely nature. With cities becoming increasingly dangerous and also increasingly unattractive

(crime rates, including murder rates going up) a cost-benefit analysis of the two alternatives could easily lead to the conclusion of moving. Evidently such people act in a way contrary to the dominant model, and their motives, hence, will be suspected. At the same time as there is incorporation at the bottom into the big machineries mentioned above there is a certain disintegration at the top with people believed to be trustworthy, reliable supporters of the system defecting. What will be the effect at the bottom when these moves attain greater proportions, and become more properly understood ?

I simply do not know. All I know is that dialogues with people classified as "rural poor" always seem to extend one's insight and I can offer some examples from dialogues last summer, one in a fishing village in southeast Asia ; an other in a mountain village in West Asia by (Europeans referred to as "Middle East"). Typical example, from the fishing village:

- I understand that what you basically want in this village is effective protection of your way of life against industrial pollution of your waters, and you want essentially to live in the village because you think that is a good life. But what is it that you would like to add to what you have, not only protection of what you have ?
- Well, there is one thing we would like more than anything else, and that is really good education.
- Good education ? You mean in order to get a good position so that one could leave the village and join the city ?
- No, not at all. We want education in order to have better life in this village.
- But in this village you do not have the types of positions that schooling is usually made for, so what do you mean ?
- What we mean is simply this : we think that people with a high education are more able to appreciate the good things in life. If you have poor education then you go in for junk, you listen to the bad music, read stupid books - if you have good education then you can much more enjoy things of a higher quality.
- Well, I admire this idea but I know many people with a very high level of education and all kinds of schools who still go in for junk !

- That may be. But that only shows that they are not really educated - - -

I am sure one could have similar dialogues in thousands, even millions of places around the world. I am also sure that it is honest, and that in fact many of the people who express the opposite, who think what they themselves want are only material things for more consumption, in fact are dishonest; if not to others, at least to themselves. I for one found that particular fisherman more able to distinguish between education and schooling than most people I know in Ministries of Education, and I also felt sorry because I know that his country is set up in such a way that it is schooling rather than education he will get. Unless something happens.

In the mountain village the problem was formulated, in a sense, in terms somewhere between the material and the non-material, "in structural terms". Their problem was by and large a problem which is now very well known; an age-old structure of land ownership and rural work with a subtle balance between soil, labour put in, fertilizer and water, animal power and seeds is upset in the name of social justice and land reform. The particular structure in that particular place is very complex, too complex to be related here, and certainly too complex to be fully reflected in a Ministry of Agriculture. But the major point is clear : as a consequence of the land reform the individual plots are too small to make the farms self-sufficient, and the subtle co-operative network among them to a large extent destroyed. The individual farmer will to a larger extent have to turn outside the village for the factors of production needed ; be that capital (loans), fertilizer (artificial rather than on the basis of exchange with farmers who have more manure), water (through new and very expensive irrigation networks rather than through older systems whose operation depended on the social structure), technical advice (from rural extension workers, fresh out of college, rather than from experience accumulated in that village through generations, centuries, maybe millennia). In short, the mistakes of traditionalism traded for the mistakes of modernism; the positive sides of traditional society to a large extent lost and the positive sides of modern society

not being available - for all these goods and services from the outside would either be too expensive, unavailable, irrelevant or rightout counter-productive. What remains is a sense of uncertainty, insecurity and ambivalence and profound dependency on the outside - in short, of being a periphery where at an earlier stage one might have been distant, but at the same time a centre of one's one. A structure destroyed, and a very poor one put in its place - a population bewildered, not necessarily longing for the old days if that meant being bossed and exploited by the over-privileged among them, with highly unclear visions of how one perhaps could combine much of what was good in the traditional pattern with some of the good things in the new one. A high price - for what ?

What these two examples amount to, in my mind, is simply this : the danger and the fallacy of working with a development model based on a hierarchy of needs. It sounds so simple and so convincing to many people : let us first satisfy the basic material needs, and then move on to the non-material needs. Maybe animals are like that. But even about this I would have some doubts: animals in modern industrialized agriculture, in food factories where they are fed to the point of overfeeding and sheltered to the point of oversheltering - never permitted to walk around and dig for their own food (lest the energy expended in that effort might reduce their market value), never permitted outside their artificial existence, do not look particularly contented. It is of course true that at the level of acute starvation, as brought about by natural or social catastrophies, the slogan "basic material needs first" is relevant. Incidentally, in such situations people are also fed like animals, lining up more or less orderly around the barrel.

But beyond this level of utter destitution the best thing one can do from the top is to assume that people at the bottom want as much freedom and identity as other people do; that they are not only concerned with security and economic well-being. They want options, choices, real choices. They want identity, meaning closeness, to their own work products, to themselves, to other people, to the society of which they are part, to nature, and to something transcendental - whether it is called God or Ideology. In our world today the city is perhaps

higher on freedom but definitely lower on identity; the villages used to be the other way round but are now rapidly being transformed in a direction where there is neither much freedom, nor much identity - and of security (particularly relative to the hazards of nature) and economic well-being there was and is not very much either. To be poor in all four senses at the same time is to be poor indeed, and much intellectual and moral courage (or blindness) is needed to launch a developmental process whereby incorporation in the city dominated system is obtained at the loss of identity, and with a vague promise of possible increase in economic well-being at some later stage. Other types of processes are needed, more modest in the goal setting, more human - and as long as nobody seems to have anything much better to suggest than local self-reliance, autonomous units big enough to produce sufficient surplus to have some light industry, schooling and medical services of their own in a pattern that would mix collective land ownership with some private plots, this seems to be the better general direction in which to move. If it creates problems for the cities then it might not be unreasonable for the villages to answer : "We have been carrying you on our backs for some centuries, millennia by now; we are not asking you to carry us; but if you improve your ability to carry yourselves, maybe we could also carry ourselves better." In short, the problem of the rural poor is probably inextricably linked to the problem of redesigning cities so that they can grow more of their own food (small plots, more vertical agriculture making use of high-rise buildings as support for plants for various types, an agricultural belt around cities to a larger extent worked by the people in the city themselves). Some level of urbanizing the countryside is probably indispensable, it will carry in its wake some level of agriculturalizing the cities.

In short, let us simply not assume that the rural poor are different from other people, let us not encase them in a strait jacket of "basic material needs" eventually turning into the cages of an animal farm. If we do not treat ourselves or our families that way one should not treat other either. What one can do, however, is to increase the intensity and the depth and spectrum of the urban rural dialogue with a hope of generating many more solutions for the benefit of either part.