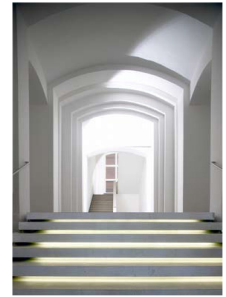


Berlin Civil Society Center

REINVENTING DEVELOPMENT

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Running the Berlin Civil Society Center is a challenging and exciting task. The Center's workshops and conferences tackle many of today's most burning issues such as climate change, global governance, the virtual dimension of the Internet, the search for a new development paradigm, etc. And, increasingly many of the world's leading civil society organisations (CSOs) such as Amnesty International, CARE International, ChildFund Alliance, Oxfam International, Plan International and Transparency International approach the Center for support in preparing their organisations for a future which most probably will be characterised by faster and more fundamental change and growing uncertainty. Pre-empting future developments and preparing our CSOs for ongoing and far-reaching change is a vital requirement for their future relevance and legitimacy. Leaders who are prepared to tackle these tasks need to welcome and embrace change. Some of the changes at hand, some of the leadership challenges in the making are the subject of the following notes.

1. Looking at development cooperation in total our efforts have failed

For over 50 years we have followed an idea usually called "development cooperation" which essentially meant that we, the rich Northern countries, would help our poor brothers and sisters in the South to develop into something similar to us. We introduced government run school and health systems the poor countries could not afford to maintain, we built roads, steelworks and electricity plants to foster an industrialisation which often did not come, we trained engineers, IT experts, doctors and nurses who ended up working in Europe or the USA instead of helping to develop their home countries. And, as decades of development cooperation went by, we were facing growing criticism that our model did not work. We defended our efforts pointing to thousands of successful projects, delivering health, education, work and hope for a better future to millions of people. Yet, if we look at the outcomes of half a century of development cooperation against our objectives to "end poverty", "eradicate hunger" or deliver "education for all" we have failed miserably.

2. Given our very limited resources we should have expected to fail

This failure to reach our grand objectives should not come as a surprise, if we look at the means at our disposal. In the 1990s all industrialised countries together transferred between 60 and 70 billion US\$ annually in development assistance to the South aiming to benefit billions of people. This amount is roughly equal to the annual transfers from West Germany to East Germany in order to rebuild this formerly communist country of 17 million inhabitants. If you consider in addition, that the former German Democratic

Republic was the communist country with the highest living standard, far above the average of the countries of the South and if you know that, after more than 20 years of these generous inner-German transfers the East of the country still has significantly lower living standards than the West, you will understand that “developing” two thirds of the total global population would require enormous amounts of money which are just not available.

3. But we have been successful in setting examples for “development”

Both governmental and non-governmental organisations quite rightly point to hundreds of thousands of successful development projects: schools where children learn skills which enable them to lead a better life, health projects dramatically improving the chances of new-borns and their mothers to survive, roads which multiply economic activities in the region they make accessible, better organised and better educated administrations providing better support to the people they serve, etc. With these tangible examples of our Northern way of life we have complemented the messages of global media which transmit pictures of our affluent life styles to the remotest corners of our planet. Together, the messages and the concrete local examples we have set created a unified global picture of progress and development. Whether in Africa, Asia or Latin America, whether you talk to slum dwellers in mega cities or peasants in remote communities: most want a job in an office, a good school for their children, top quality health care for their families, a television set, a car and holidays in Paris, London or New York.

4. And suddenly we find 1 billion people on the road to “development”

Only a few years ago, China and India started developing just in the way we had always planned for: they industrialised and exported goods and services to our markets, they constructed roads and airports and power plants, and they built hospitals, schools and universities. And, quasi over night, millions of “newly developed” consumers entered the market economy, ate more meat, purchased mobile phones, television sets and computers, drove their own cars and travelled by plane. Little of this has been achieved by development cooperation, but it is development nevertheless – the development we worked for so hard over all these years. Over the next few years about one billion people in China, India and other key countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, Brazil and Mexico will make significant progress on their personal paths towards our Northern life styles and consumption patterns. There is no question that this is very good news for most of those who are able to progress in this way: they will be healthier with a much longer life expectancy, they will be better educated, doing less dangerous and less exploitative work, they will send their children to school and even university and, generally, they will lead more comfortable and less precarious lives.

5. To our great surprise our concept of development is unsustainable

And now – to our great surprise – we find that the development paradigm we have so successfully practiced ourselves and promoted to others is unsustainable. We just do not have the water to allow everybody the average water consumption of an American; we do not have enough arable land to produce enough meat to allow everybody the average

meat consumption of a EU citizen; and our climate does not tolerate the level of CO₂ emission to allow everybody to drive their own car like the average Japanese does. Now, that our unsustainable development “Northern style” finally has become the global paradigm and we can expect hundreds of millions more to successfully embark on their personal path to development, the increasing scarcity of clean water, the lack of arable land and, most dramatically; climate change show us very clearly that our planet cannot provide the resources required for all humans to lead our Northern lives of affluence.

6. We need a new and radically different understanding of development

But to date we have not yet drawn any conclusions from the fact that the world’s resources are limited and that we are getting ever closer to the point when there will be not enough left to distribute. And as we continue our business as usual accelerating into a dead end street, we will eventually be surprised – once again – by an increasingly hostile Northern public who does not want “development in the South” to continue, because they feel that it threatens their own affluence and by an increasingly violent Southern population who will claim their fair share of the world’s resources. As a result the number and level of conflicts globally will probably increase and terrorism will fall on fertile soil. And civil society organisations may not have all too many options left beyond calling for peace. In order to avoid such a threatening scenario we need to urgently review and redefine our concepts of human progress and development. While “the limits to growth” have been debated since the eponymous Club of Rome publication in 1972, only lately the discussion about a new development paradigm has gained ground, often in the context of the Millennium Development Goals. The following three points centre on what I consider key elements of a new global understanding of “development”.

7. We need to reconcile development and environmental protection

Development as we practice it today means *maximising the exploitation of available resources* while environmental protection means *conserving key resources* like soil, water, climate, and bio diversity. No wonder that there are numerous and obvious conflicts between the two approaches: clearing forests in order to make arable land available to poor peasants, building roads to improve marginalised people’s market access, or starting a social housing project at the outskirts of the city, all strive for development at the cost of the environment. On the other hand there are examples where poor farmers have been evicted from national parks and other environmentally important areas in order to better protect plants and animals. We need to overcome these apparent contradictions as we can no longer afford development without environmental protection nor environmental protection without development, both approaches being equally unsustainable. When trying to bridge this seemingly insurmountable gap we need to look equally at modern techniques (e.g. in agriculture to increase yield/acre) and at traditional ones (e.g. land use and conservation techniques) and chose the ones which are best suited to deliver a sustainable compromise between exploitation and conservation of our world’s scarce resources.

8. We need to rebalance North and South aiming for global justice

If everybody alive in our world today would have the same life style and living standard as the average German does we would need two additional worlds to the one we have in order to satisfy the demand for natural resources. Obviously these extra worlds are not available. Therefore the continued overconsumption in our Northern societies is no longer feasible. In a world of limited resources, development is a zero sum game: resources we use in the North are not available in the South. If we are serious in our efforts to secure decent lives for the billions of poor in the South we will have to reduce the resources we consume for maintaining our affluent lives in the North. We will no longer be able to maintain a development thinking which practically exclusively looks at the South and ignores the fact that the resource intensive life styles of the world's rich dramatically limit the space available for the development of the world's poor. Only if we, the rich, reduce our consumption of renewable and non-renewable resources, there will be the space for credible and effective poverty alleviation. Consequently, we need to redefine the objective of development, steering away from unmitigated growth and towards a fair distribution of the world's limited resources. Global justice has to become our new development paradigm. Development policy in rich countries – no matter whether it is conducted by governments or civil society organisations – will only make sense in the future if it does no longer turn a blind eye to our own development.

9. We need to care much more for future generations

Some of the negative effects of our present development approach, such as mass extinction of species, climate change and the danger of a nuclear disaster, may create enormous problems for many generations to come. If we want to keep these and similar effects under control we will have to dramatically change our thinking: we will have to find a better balance between maximising the benefits for ourselves and protecting the rights of future generations to live their lives in human dignity. This means that we will have to replace a mostly reactive development approach which triggers action only once external changes have happened with a pre-emptive approach which tries to foresee future challenges and requirements and acts on the basis of sound assumptions. In the future, our understanding of development will need to be solidly embedded in a long term perspective which tries to explore also those effects of our actions which may only come about in the distant future. As Boards and Senior Management of large global CSOs usually are very busy dealing with the organisation's immediate challenges they will find it difficult to dedicate sufficient time and resources to exploring future threats and opportunities. But as the speed, scope and complexity of change continue to grow, thinking ahead becomes an increasingly vital leadership quality.

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