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Can We Plan the Development Planning?

By Prof. Dr. Richard F. Behrendt, Berlin

After talking to a good number of people in all walks of life, in several countries of Latin America, one receives the impression that the Alliance for Progress has been too good as a propaganda instrument and not good enough as a means of bringing about development. It has raised hopes once more, on both sides of the Rio Grande, particularly, of course, in Latin America, probably to a higher pitch than ever before. These hopes are now being disappointed; and Latin Americans, again in all walks of life, from Presidents and cabinet ministers to taxi drivers and peasants, are being quite articulate about it.

With regard to "technical assistance", Latin Americans seem to have reached now a state of psychological saturation which makes them very sceptical and cynical with any kind of such assistance which does not promise immediate tangible results—material or political ones.

This forces us to take a candid look at the basic reasons why the "development performance" of the Alliance for Progress, and the many attempts which have preceded it, at least since the end of World War II, have been unsatisfactory. The dire lesson of Cuba and the facts that, as its effects, the Alliance for Progress became necessary and that since its inception conditions in Latin America have deteriorated further, should convince us of the need for looking more deeply for the causes of insufficient development and for evolving better means for dealing with them.

Basic Requirements of Social Change

One cause is a faulty understanding of the basic causes of under-development. If these were lack of technical knowledge and of capital—as is still presumed by most—considerable progress would have been made since 1945. Much more important are psychological and social factors such as the following:

- ☐ acquisition of new—dynamic instead of static—habits of thinking and living, such as the setting and pursuit of new goals, by ambition, imagination and reasoning, instead of contentment with existing conditions, submission under a supposedly unchangeable destiny, and faith in tradition;
- ☐ decision making by discussion and compromise rather than by command or revolution;
- ☐ willingness and ability for responsible participation within ever larger, more mobile, and more complex spheres of relationships, not only in the family and in the immediate neighbourhood but also in industrial plants, labour unions, cooperatives, the community at large, up to the national and international levels.

If these social and psychological requirements for cultural change are neglected, economic development efforts will cause serious dis-equilibria with respect to

motivations, often within one and the same person, and also with respect to social classes and regions, with severe conflicts and political repercussions. They will thus defeat their own ends.

What we have to understand, then, is that the hitherto underdeveloped peoples—and all Latin American peoples belong to them, though in different degrees—find themselves in transition between a pre-dominantly static and a predominantly dynamic culture.

Statics is characterized by attitudes of unquestioned routine based on faith and tradition, conservative styles of life in small loyalty groups, with particular emphasis on the joint family and the small community.

Dynamics is characterized by continuous change rooted in ambition, exploration and scientific knowledge, progressive styles of life in expanding social units based on an ever widening and more intensive division of labor.

The transition between these basically different cultural and social systems is mostly spontaneous, i.e. unplanned. Inevitably, it brings with it loss of orientation, emotional and social insecurity, and subjectivism: the old, universally valid values and norms are decaying while no new comparable system of social values and norms has yet been attained. (In countries which have entered dynamics earlier, at least a certain syncretism of practically applicable values has been reached.) Consequently, everyone has to grope for his own solutions.

This transitional state also results in insecurity concerning many traditional attitudes and institutions. E.g., inherited privileges are considered justified in a static, hierarchical society; in a dynamic society, which recognizes only earned rights, the survival of certain inherited rights is considered as evidence of corruption. In a static society, the claims of the joint family rank very high; in a dynamic one, they are considered nepotism. Workers in societies in transition often react to higher earnings by working less. Quote generally, there is little understanding of the roots of "Western" comparative prosperity, especially of the fact that it is based on the initiative, the resourcefulness, the risk taking, and the material sacrifices of both employers and employees during the long period of early capitalism.

Up to now, those responsible for economic development policies—even in the underdeveloped countries themselves—have very rarely viewed their problems in this context. As a result, we are now facing numerous and acute symptoms of a disharmonic cultural change. The horizon of expectations of people in underdeveloped countries is growing much faster than their ability to materialize them. The demonstration effect, which is caused by the example of the econom-

ically advanced peoples, is working against them. Their example is causing inferiority feelings, envy, steadily increasing demands for their help, and frustration and disappointment at their inevitable failure to meet them.

Effective Development Policy Means Planned Cultural Change

Thus, economic and social development must be seen and pursued as two aspects of the same cultural process. Let us try to define these two terms.

Economic development:

Activities designed to bring about, and resulting in, growth of the productivity and the purchasing power of the largest possible number of members of a social unit, particularly of those with the lowest standards of living.

Social development:

Activities designed to bring about, and resulting in, growth of the ability of the largest possible number of members of a social unit to contribute to economic development, to share in its results, and to participate in public life to the fullest possible extent, by converting their mental and intellectual potentialities into realities, with particular attention to those sectors of the population which hitherto have had the least opportunity to do so.

Economic and social development must be pursued and can be attained only jointly. The first without the second would be comparable to building a machine without a source of power; the second without the first would be comparable to organizing a bakery without having flour.

When speaking about "development", without qualification, we therefore refer always to economic and social development.

Every development activity takes place within a certain environment which is defined through the following principal factors (aside from the natural ones):

- ☐ the objective requirements for action, in a certain priority scale, as means for attaining the desired development aims; these means can be, on principle, shown scientifically;
- ☐ the existing cultural situation (relatively long-term), which is normally one of transition from a static to a dynamic culture, and the limits as well as possibilities for change which it presents;

- ☐ the existing political situation (relatively short-term), which sets certain goals for, as well as limits to, effective action.

Therefore, an effective development policy must be a planned cultural change.

The new magic word, planning, at present plays an important role in the Alliance for Progress. Comprehensive planning for economic and social development is considered a prerequisite for large-scale outside aid. Planning comprises the following:

- ☐ analyzing the existing situation;
- ☐ clarifying its causes: geographic, historical, ethnic, social and economic;
- ☐ assuming tentative goals;
- ☐ defining deficiencies and requirements in the light of the assumed goals;
- ☐ reviewing the internal and external means which may be mobilized: natural resources, manpower on all levels, social attitudes and institutions, financial funds;
- ☐ setting forth concrete measures which should and can be taken for the maximal mobilization of potentially available means in order to achieve optimal results; and
- ☐ defining realistic ends which can be reached in the light of the foregoing planning activities.

Planning is characteristic and even essential for a dynamic social system—although it does not necessarily take place in a centralized, institutional form but can be undertaken by innumerable individuals and groups—but it is unnecessary and even impossible in a static society, which is governed by continuity of basic data and the belief in their eternal validity. Thus, while planning for dynamics is necessary, the very concept is alien to the underdeveloped peoples. In fact, lack of ability for and experience in planning is precisely an outstanding symptom of slow or lacking economic and social development. The attitudes of underdeveloped peoples are either rooted in tradition and faith or uprooted through disharmonious, i.e. unplanned cultural change.

Overdeveloped Development Agencies

We, the development planners of today, are trying to meet—or get around?—this dilemma by building up a huge bureaucratic machinery with which we attempt to prescribe and execute development schemes for the masses. Being intellectuals, we are in danger to suc-



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cumb to one of the typical superstitions of our time: that we can solve problems by "creating" more and bigger organizations which—in accordance with "Parkinson's Law"—acquire a kind of life of their own and become ends in themselves. We are inclined to measure development performance by the number and size of agencies, the number of "experts" engaged in research, planning, and administration, the number and length of their reports, and—last but certainly not least—the funds being spent by the United States, the international agencies, and now also some European countries.

The result, so far, has been an overdevelopment of development agencies which are getting into each other's way, with an overproduction of reports and recommendations which have largely remained paper work. These agencies have become favorite objects of exploitation, for financial or prestige gains, by politicians in underdeveloped countries. On the other hand, their attempts to limit their aid to justified projects and to control the utilization of their aid funds have provoked open resentment among these same politicians and appeals to the national pride of their peoples. At any rate, little improvement of the welfare of these peoples has resulted from this.

It is, of course, true that the underdeveloped countries face a multitude of problems and needs which must be met with very few adequately equipped persons and organizations. This alone would be enough to explain the almost universal tendency toward centralization and guidance from above, toward concentration of decision making and execution in the national governments, in the underdeveloped countries, and also in most of those outside agencies which are trying to aid them.

However, if those governments were capable of assuming such a task, the problems with which we are attempting to deal would not exist or would resolve themselves in due course. The obvious inability of the governments to conceive and, especially, to carry out effective development policies is caused not chiefly by lack of financial means or of technical knowledge, which could be coped with relatively easily, but by a social structure and by historically rooted styles of life and habits of feeling, thinking and acting which are expressions of specific cultures different from those of economically advanced countries.

Decentralization Instead of Centralization

A striking example of the impotence of centralized government as promoter, as "demiurgos" of development is Brasília: an unbelievably expensive collection of architecturally interesting and partly even impressive buildings, yet empty and lifeless monuments to the misplaced belief in the creativity of politicians and bureaucrats instead of producers in the fields and factories. Even the official argument—that the capital (in the narrow meaning of the seat of the national government agencies) must be located in the hitherto neglected hinterland—reveals a completely unrealistic expectation of the state acting as the creator of development. This idea can probably be traced back to the despots of early oriental cultures and of European baroque absolutism. But it is out of tune with a basic trend of our time.

Contrary to a prevailing impression, this basic trend does not point toward the need for ever increasing centralization but to democracy, i.e., to the need for participation of an increasing portion of the members of social units in discussion and decision making on numerous levels, in order to bring to bear their different experiences and ideas on the ever more complex issues of an expanding and mobile society. Thus, decentralization is becoming an indispensable means of dynamics. Even the communist regimes are being forced to learn this lesson.

This has, of course, a bearing on the entire concept of development planning. The notion of centralized long-term planning based on refined methods of evaluating and analyzing national accounts and projecting them in future presupposes a state of development which has still to be created. It is therefore unsuitable for and unapplicable to underdeveloped countries which are lacking not only in sufficiently accurate statistics but also in the psychological and social prerequisites for drawing up such plans and adhering to them.

This approach can be actually harmful because it can—and frequently does—give us a false sense of certainty and accomplishment, after having drawn up an "ivory tower plan". It is just as much out of place in those countries as some of the newest, most capital-intensive machinery in countries with high unemployment and scarcity of capital. Furthermore, it is bound to strengthen even more the widespread apathy which makes people in underdeveloped countries expect everything from the government.

The Threat of Political Rebellion

If we neglect or ignore these elementary facts of social life, we erect an intellectual and institutional screen between ourselves, as representatives of certain fixed methodological and organizational (and sometimes also ideological) concepts, and the social environment which we are to serve, and condemn ourselves to futility and failure. We have largely become captives of certain notions, terms and methods which have proved inadequate, after having been confronted with the Latin American realities. Since we are among the bearers of dynamics we must be willing to adjust those to our dynamic experience and to search for a more effective approach. It could prove fatal if the present outlay of larger funds and the almost frantic appeal to the good will of all concerned, in the Alliance for Progress, were not accompanied by a better strategy and tactics of development.

The underdeveloped peoples may pass from the rule of one oligarchy to that of another: from the old, traditional, mostly landowning oligarchy of tribal chieftains (as in Africa) or feudal landlords and priests (as in Latin America) to a new élite of ambitious politicians, labor leaders, and intellectuals, anxious to impose their superior knowledge and insight on the supposedly ignorant, lazy, and indifferent masses. (This thesis does not overlook the fact that planners as yet have very little power and are frequently swarthed by the practical politicians.) There are signs that these groups assume the same kind of rationalization with which their predecessors, the traditional rulers, were trying to justify their power

monopoly: "We must decide for the people because they are too dumb or too lazy to get anywhere by themselves".

Yet, development by command, imposed by a small minority upon a large majority, will sooner or later provoke rebellion and political instability; it will remain largely ineffectual because of the lack of understanding and sufficient motivation on the part of those who have to carry it out; and it will leave the masses as incapable of making their own decisions and of sharing in the fruits of development as they have always been, in other words, "dumb and lazy". This autocratic setup does not permit them to learn by experiment and experience, which is the only way of learning social techniques. Thus, what the masses are blamed for is really the fault of their rulers—the old or the new ones.

How do we get out of this vicious circle? First of all, we have to keep in mind the following:

- ☐ The basic causes of underdevelopment have historical roots.
- ☐ They are social factors which must be understood within the context of cultures.
- ☐ They can be changed only through general socio-cultural change.
- ☐ Social factors are, therefore, more important than technical and economic ones but they are also more difficult to change.
- ☐ Technical and financial aid measures can be effective only insofar as they are geared to a socio-cultural change which releases and encourages attitudes which in the static social order have been neglected or repressed, e.g., curiosity, inquisitiveness, ambition, initiative, willingness to take risks, social mobility, and widest possible participation of the greatest number of people. Without this prerequisite, we may have a country theoretically capable of economic development, on the basis of a survey of its natural resources and the technical possibilities of utilizing them productively, but not for development, in the sense of the necessary social attitudes and institutions.

Development by Command — an Illusion

Development is first of all a question of motivation and participation. The shortcut to development by command is an illusion—unless one chooses the Russian and Chinese way. There is no substitute for the willingness to set oneself new and wider goals, to adopt new ways of doing things, and to assume a share in the responsibility for larger social units.

Whether and to what extent these attitudes can come about depends on the social environment, more exactly on the social structure or the social stratification. These factors are becoming increasingly elastic. They are no longer an unchangeable framework for man's thoughts and actions, destined by fate, as in static times. Thus, our responsibility for setting the right goals and for choosing the most effective means to attain them has become greater than ever before.

We should guard against two erroneous views, both of which are nowadays held, even though they are contradictory: that certain races or regions are excluded from effective participation in development by

irreversible natural facts; or that there is a universally applicable recipe for development which can be successfully prescribed everywhere, regardless of cultural differences.

The decisive question is thus: can we awaken or activate interest in development and willingness and ability to cooperate in it, in all potentially significant social, economic and political sectors and on all educational and income levels of a given population? A realistic planning should first of all deal with this, with preferred attention to already existing forms of social activity which might be adaptable to, and carriers of, change. Instead of establishing ever more bureaucratic institutions, mostly located far away from their field of work, we should help existing, perhaps traditionally rooted social units to develop themselves according to the new requirements and opportunities. (One example: the Indian communities in Latin America which might change themselves into cooperatives and carriers of rural community development.) The best way is by giving them a chance to contribute to grassroot planning.

Elements of a Realistic Planning Concept

The contribution of single men and single social units will greatly vary, of course. But that does not matter. What matters is that decisions should be made as closely as possible to the level of their execution so that both the practical experience and the good will of those who have to carry them out will be enlisted; and that techniques of orderly, peaceful solution of conflicts and of forming a better way of life should be learned in the very process of planning on multiple levels.

Such shared, composite plans will be very probably not only more realistic but also more immune to changes of governments and ministers because they will exist not only in the minds of a few key persons but will be rooted in the convictions and habits of broad sectors of the population, thus assuring the continuity of specific developments efforts which is now so sadly lacking.

Thus, development planning must include "low" levels of daily working and living, not only in contents but in regard to the "social location" of its contributors. We must encourage the growth or the formation of social groups which can give expression to the—hitherto mostly neglected—potentialities of the inarticulate masses so that they can make significant contributions to the planning and to the implementation of the plans. We must foster new ways of discussing, deciding, and doing new things, in small circles of people, within their particular sphere of experience and understanding.

This would also be the only effective way of approaching democracy. Democracy, as voluntary participation in social decision making and action, can grow only from below to above, from smaller to larger social spheres, in accordance with the growth of understanding and experience of ever more people in their transition from subjects to citizens.

A large part of the people of Latin America has not yet a concrete understanding of the fact that they are members of a nation. How can we expect them to play a meaningful role in national elections and

can attach decisive importance to such elections? Yet we are inclined—at least at this moment—to consider “free elections” as a prerequisite to development aid. We should rather inquire whether a government, regardless of its political texture, is willing to work for economic and social development of its people through planning by pluralistic participation, thus getting the people started on the inevitably long road to full democracy—even if this may mean changes of the traditional social income and power structure.

Towards a Strategy of Cooperation for Pluralistic Planning

It is high time that we started working on the strategy of cooperation for pluralistic planning between state and international agencies, private business, cooperatives, labour unions, and rural communities. I say: started, because hardly any concrete steps seem to have been taken until now.

Usually it is taken for granted that at least the governments of underdeveloped countries understand the importance of planning and of adhering to a realistic, comprehensive plan (particularly in cases in which the government itself requests technical assistance for this). In reality, the primary task of planning the planning must still be to educate governments, business, organized labor, and as many other sectors of the population as possible for this and to engage them in discussions about the aims, methods and contents of development planning. In a more advanced state, the results of the pluralistic planning should be made known and should be explained to the people, by encouraging discussions on all levels, from village schools and community assemblies to universities, parliaments and the press.

This has been neglected completely. One finds today in Latin America almost complete ignorance of the aims and results of development planning, coupled with acrimonious criticism leveled preferably at the foreign and international agencies for certain advice and measures—or for the lack of them—without any understanding of the reasons. Particularly the members of outside advisory missions have kept away from public discussions, apparently for fear of getting “mixed up in local politics”; but they have thus largely operated outside the sphere of effective decisions and concrete action.

Almost equally neglected have been direct working relationships between religious communities, townships, cooperatives, labor unions, and other voluntary or official local bodies in underdeveloped countries and their counterparts in North America or Europe. Yet, very much could be done thereby for mobilizing additional initiatives and to make development efforts less dependent upon a cumbersome and often corrupt state bureaucracy.

Getting the Planning Planned

On the linking of development planning and implementation with its own social environment will depend the effectiveness of the planning and the objectives at which it can aim. On this will depend furthermore the ability of underdeveloped peoples to

“digest” outside aid, be it technical or economic. As is well known, many of them now suffer from indigestion.

Let us try to finally draw some conclusions for “getting the planning planned”:

1. The planning should be comprehensive, adequate to the breadth of the cultural change which it must stimulate and at the same time control. It should not be possible for the chief of a Latin American planning agency to hold—as I was recently given to understand—that social issues should remain outside the terms of reference because they are politically too hot, thus neglecting that rational allocation of manpower, labor productivity, social security, housing, education, rural community life, geographic and social mobility of the population and the changes in social stratification are decisive elements of any development process.
2. A realistic framework for the planning should be set, without illusions about its possibilities. The long-term work should be limited to the setting of basic goals and principles of economic and social policies best suited to approach them; the short-term planning should concern itself with the setting of priorities and the stimulation of concrete measures which promise early results.
3. The planning should be done jointly by all agencies concerned—national, regional, world-wide, and bilateral. (Many planners seem to have neglected this basic planning for themselves.)
4. A realistic division of labor should be agreed upon, as far as the contributions of the various sectors and institutions inside the country are concerned, with the greatest possible participation of regional and local institutions and voluntary groups from social, cultural and religious bodies, cooperatives, associations of producers, employers and employees. One of the most discouraging experiences when looking closely at the development efforts under the Alliance for Progress is the lack of this and even the lack of understanding of its importance, among most of those responsible for the organization of development planning.
5. Multiple forces must thus be awakened to an understanding of (a) the needs, (b) the possibilities of meeting them, and (c) their responsibility for contributing to the conversion of possibilities into realities.

Thus, the only way out of the present stagnation will be a shift of emphasis from the prescription-dispensing type of planning to a type of planning based on a strategy of cooperation, mobilization and participation of the greatest possible number of people in decision-making and execution, and the awakening of a development conscience in the broad masses which will enable them to correlate their desires with adequate concrete action.

All this requires much more imagination, courage for experimentation, and adaptability to new and unfamiliar requirements than has so far been apparent in the majority of developing planners, experts and officials. Planning is largely—perhaps decisively—an educational task. It is therefore bound to be a relatively long, gradual and slow process. Planning effective planning—instead of improvising or stereotyping it as a routine job—requires self-education of the planners. Perhaps, in setting up our priority scales, we should give the highest rating to this.