

The Way Forward

World Society appears to have come to cross roads. It is trying to get a feel as to which way to go. In this context Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, Sweden has in its issue no 47-June 2006 of Development Dialogue set into motion a debate on “What Next?”. “The Way Forward” makes some suggestions in this regard.

The world society is an agglomerate of nation States. Nation States comprise within them plurality of sub-societies divided into regional and sub regional entities and multiple ethnicities. Within each of these regional and sub-regional entities/ethnicities are smaller group formations, associations of persons, households in turn made up of families and individuals. This network of individuals, households, associations, regional and sub-regional entities/ethnicities, nation states and the whole world order is enmeshed economically, politically, socially and in several other ways including religion into a global whole such that each component is responding to the functioning of the whole and the whole is responding to behaviour pattern of each of its components. It is this interaction of micro and macro, of small and big, of the component and the whole which constitutes the development process of the world society. To understand this response pattern of the whole to its parts, and of the parts to the whole is the essential pre-requisite to guide the world society towards any normative goal that the world society may set for itself.

Millenium development goal and similar other targetted achievements including universal peace, freedom from hunger and disease, other universal freedoms enshrined in various charters of the United Nations and even in several national charters and constitutions require not only better understanding of the relationships between the whole and its parts but also how, where and when to intervene in these relationship so as to steer the world society to its normative goals that have been or may be set by the wise men of this world. Good health of the world society requires encouraging appropriate positive inputs and discouraging/discontinuing negative inputs.

Meandering Society

Ours is a meandering society and each part of our society is meandering. To give it and each of its parts the freedom to meander is an important requirement for the society to move forward towards an integrated whole. If some part of it is not allowed to meander, that part will suffocate. Suffocating, it will do all at its command to survive, even if it hurts the larger well being of the humanity. But if each part positive in nature gets enough freedom to meander and at the same time appropriate guidance including funding support by way of access to resources and extension education the result may be an accelerated and universal growth, social, economic, political and what else consistent with sustainability and around happiness.

Currently larger and larger sets of people and social entities are getting freedom to act and space for such action. There are, however, groups which do not find themselves so blessed at this point of time but generally realize the value of freedom of thought and action. Thesis here is that this realization of link between freedom of thought and action and well being of humanity is now fairly well realized and humanity will, even if by slow degrees, take this path.

At present, there are, in the world system, groups of people who are not in alignment with the world society at large. They perceive their interests and their well being constrained by the way world society is organized. But even among these disgruntled groups a minority realizes the larger ethos of the emerging world society and will, hopefully, guide the others within them to appreciate the route the world society is taking and rationale for it.

Over the long run these groups of people will fall in line with the processes of development set into motion by a relatively free and freeing world. More and more people will gradually join this “band-wagon” till all of them are on board. That will be the day to rejoice.

But when and how will this day come? There is scourge of poverty, with all its ramifications of ill health, ignorance, unemployability etc. It is almost sometime now that means to eradicate poverty worldwide have become available to humanity. A judicious use of the available tools to eradicate poverty has eluded humanity. It is unfortunate that these tools have not been well utilized already. But humanity is on a learning curve. In some long years it will catch up with this issue and ensure that poverty or at least pain from within poverty is alleviated /eradicated. This is a feasible agenda and is in progress. And eradication/elimination of stark poverty world wide will

be the first phase of homogenization of the world society. It will considerably weaken the causes that divide. Eradication of poverty and increased well being all around will strengthen the desire for peace and collective survival. Heterogenising effects of religion and race, of superior and inferior, of good and not-so-good, will also settle down as education spreads and awareness of treating others as one would like to be treated increases. These things are not going to happen tomorrow. These will take a long long time. But then humanity lives not in years but in millennia.

Technology and Natural Resource

Problematic factor, however, is the pace of technology development and need for more and more natural resources to meet ever increasing needs arising from commercialization of newer technologies. Incremental availability of natural resources is highly constrained. The capability of conservational efforts, in terms of creating availability of additional natural resources is also extremely limited. The pace at which technological transformation is proceeding accompanied with obsolescence at a quicker pace creates conditions in which groups of people will find themselves engaged as warring factions. They will struggle to have their share in development through, in the first place, a larger share in available raw materials and nature based resources. This struggle between different claimants for natural resources will need to be reconciled.

One method will be to do so through force. Share of each will depend upon the degree of its strength. This will be the quickest route to auto-destruction by the world society.

The other route is that of understanding and reconciliation. Those superior in strength and organisation will show understanding of the needs of other competing groups of people. They will attempt to provide for it through creating more space for the relatively weaker societies/nation states. If some states lower in the development scale are allowed more access to available materials the obvious corollary will be that some other somewhat higher on the developmental scale will need to forego access to the same raw material or natural resources. And when those in a position of strength willingly deny themselves access to resources which they have the prowess to control, a more humane basis for the world society becomes possible.

This voluntary denial of access to resources, so that these remain available to others, requires forbearance not only on the part of the Governments of the day but also the people whom they represent. Most rich and powerful societies/nation states are also functioning democracies and their Governments are heavily dependent upon the

goodwill and votes of its people. The difficult part for Governments in this situation is to explain to its people the need for such sagacity. Very few, private individuals/ households are willing to give up any of their comforts/ resources in favour of people living several thousand miles away. The haves need to be explained the inter dependence of their well being and its links to the well being of the relatively disadvantaged worldwide. People must understand through education and action as to what is good for the international community is also good for them specially in the long run. The poor of the world have to be kept in alignment with the rest of the world society to ensure survival of all in peace and happiness. The task here is that of educating the educated and the resourceful as to how their forbearance will help them.

In a globalising world inter-dependence of nation states is more than established. It is also established that what lifts up the poor nations also almost simultaneously lifts up the nations that are better off. This understanding of the ground realities and sacrifices that may be made by the relatively well off will provide larger developmental gains on the rebound, making the world society more sustainable, equitable and livable. But there are constraints to the totality of development. There cannot be infinite development in a world blessed with finite resources. Bottlenecks in the overall availability of resources will appear sooner or later even if the world society agrees to sharing of available resources in an equitable manner. Sharing may help in bringing about a happier and less stressed world society but does not enlarge the resource base with which this planet has been blessed by nature.

Some, faced with this dilemma have relied on innovation as the way out. Fresh innovations make possible to produce same level of goods and services through somewhat lesser use of inputs, thus making growth possible within available resources. Theoretically this is true and to some extent has been experienced in the past few decades. But experience also suggests that incremental developmental needs at any and every point of time have far exceeded the potential of innovations to identify new resources or economize on existing resource use to produce an ever larger basket of good and services. It is in this scenario that conflicts will come about if excessive draw is made on world resources by any one set of people to the neglect of others.

Demand Management

If this be the case only answer to limit the size of the natural resources required is to reduce the over all size of demand for goods and services. To ask those who are at subsistence levels or at the margins of economic well being to limit their resource use

will not cut much ice. One option is to ask the affluent and super affluent both in developed and developing economies, to so manage their demand that input requirements to meet their demands are consistent with overall sustainability. It is important to ensure that such demands do not disturb the world ecology by excessive use of natural resources or through pollution of air, water and other gifts of nature, including forest cover.

Today we value freedom including freedom of choice with regard to our life style. This choice has to be exercised prudently. Studies suggest that happiness of individuals and families much depend, on the degree of freedom enjoyed by them including freedom of choice with respect to levels and composition of consumption. How this freedom is to be handled responsibly in todays national/ global context such that it does not disturb the ecology or peace on this planet merits attention. Today freedom exists and freedom of choice including that of consumption is part of being in most societies. It will, hopefully, soon be so for those who are at present denied this privilege. In this context managing this freedom of choice responsibly is one important ingredient of strategies for the global future.

Another area that may deserve the attention of the world society (UN et al) is limiting the availability of what may be considered undesirable options. Efforts in this direction, to some extent, are already being focused. Issues such as drug trafficking, nuclear non-proliferation, water and noise pollution, conflict resolution etc are receiving attention. But greater attention needs to be paid to analysis of what is possible in the area of creating a “positive” list of technology advancement and social action, including social choices whose technology advancement through accelerated research and development may be more appropriate.

In an earlier issue of Development Dialogue (1999:1-2) emphasis has been placed on Environment, Technology and Corporatization (ETC century). Villain of the piece in this setting is Technology or more emphatically R & D i.e. resources devoted to technology development. If technology and R & D effort support be rearranged, under UN/World Society guidance to preferred areas such as growing more food, eradicating mass killer diseases, educating all, economizing on inputs for same outputs it would initiate a journey in the right direction. There may be a U.N/World Society sponsored list of “positive” and “negative” technology and R & D related efforts and these should be carefully orchestrated as to merit attention. In particular, demonstration technology and R & D (going to the moon, orbiting in space, experimenting in frozen areas of the globe, manufacturing more and more lethal weapons etc) may be kept on hold for a decade or so to ensure more resources, both in manpower and finance, for more deserving areas of socio-economic change.

Globalization and Development

World is flat and is flattening each day. Much of this flattening depends on the height from which one views it. Ask someone ill without access to a medical facility or suffering from hunger without access to food, or a child without access to school and we have a view of a world which is not so flat. And more and more people are viewing the world as becoming more uneven. It is this contrast between a section of world society which is part of ever flattening globe and another section finding the world more uneven each day that merits attention of those engaged in mending the affairs of the world society.

A friend likened the world society to a bottle. The argument is that 50 percent of the world population is inside the bottle with another 50 percent being outside it. Those outside are clamouring to get into it but fail to do so. Even inside the bottle there are currently about 10 – 15 percent occupying top of the bottle and the rest about 35-40 percent in the body of the bottle. The top 10 to 15 percent manage the affairs of the world and order things about. Others inside the bottle respond to their needs and service and support those inside the bottle. 50 percent outside the bottle largely fend for themselves while also attending to the needs of 50 percent inside the bottle. These largely live at the margin of social and economic well being. For these the world arrangements are fairly uneven and in their view unfair and inequitable.

This system did work for a long time while the bottle was rather opaque and those outside the bottle did not know much about what was happening inside the bottle. They accepted their situation as their fate. Religion, perhaps, confirmed their belief in their place in society and further added to the continuation of status quo of “insiders” and “outsiders”. Media, both print and visual, aided by civil society have helped to change all this. The media has, with speed, made the bottle almost transparent. In fact it has somewhat exaggerated the occurrences and events inside the bottle and thus further enhanced the perceived distance between “insiders” and “outsiders”. The result is increasing grudge of the outsiders with the insiders and attempts by some of them to forcibly break into the bottle.

In this scenario all-round development which is all inclusive becomes a sine-qua -non for the healthy survival of the world society. At the same time this development has to be organized in such manner that it has more horizontal spread among many rather than vertical growth among few. This is important to ensure that growth has a stabilizing effect on world environment and world society rather than a destabilizing effect in terms of sociological frictions and/ or environmental degradation.

Sociology and Social Change

In this context world society must learn how best to harness positive forces of technology and combine these with positive forces of social change. There is a constant interaction between technology and sociology via economic and several other disciplines which use existing and new technologies. Sociological adjustments are somewhat slow moving and often take a long time. This time lag between technological advancement and sociological adjustments needs to be abridged by paying greater attention to acceleration of social adaptation and social change. Of late social adjustments or sociology have often been neglected or taken for granted. There are far few sociologists on job today as compared to earlier times. Best talent is being absorbed by elite disciplines of technology, finance and management, to the neglect of sociology, whereas solutions to most urgent problems of the world lie in the sphere of sociological understanding of their causes.

Terrorism, religious fanaticism, quackery, misplaced beliefs, extremists of all hues are all subjects needing sociological attention. There are thousands of practices that are geographic specific in different countries and societies details of which are so horrifying that these will benumb human mind. Some of these are embedded in tradition and history and have needlessly stayed with us because of inadequate effort in the area of sociological transformation.

This is an era where almost every technological effort as it impacts society also creates some sociological imperatives. At the same time no preparatory work is done prior to or after the introduction of any technology driven change to accelerate the process of social adoption to induced technical changes. The challenges thrown up by issues arising from mutation of genes, creation of gene banks, animal and human clones, issues of terrorism, extremism and the like are yet to be resolved in the sociological arena and deserve priority attention of the world society.

The declining number of able sociologists and their declining status in society does not augur well for the future well being of the society at large. Combining “positive” sociology with “positive” technology will hopefully bring about better balance both in the national and international arrangements for economic and social well being of the people at large. It will also facilitate and accelerate homogeneity between different social groups within nations and between nations. Assumption is that sociologists themselves practice and preach “positive” social behaviours which may be normatively determined by the wise of the world. Thus, we do not wish to leave development to take its own course. Some decisions on the basis of value judgment of the wise will need to be made. This over cautious attitude of most wise men to remain value neutral

and let things shape up on their own does not augur well for the long term future of the world society. The wise in society will have to start believing in themselves and in their judgment as to what is good for the future of their micro societies in keeping with the overall well being of the macro world society.

Practicing the Preaching

In Hindu philosophy there is a concept of nirvana which roughly translated means complete bliss through a state of wantlessness. If wantlessness leads to complete bliss, limiting wants will certainly lead in the direction of that complete bliss. It will also pave the way for better societal and ecological balance and reduce inter societal frictions.

“Enough is enough” as ably presented by one of the authors in “What Next?” is part of this philosophy and needs to be endorsed at all forums¹. Its acceptance, however, requires sociological re-orientation of the societies at large, in every geographic location. Greater attention, therefore, needs to be paid to this aspect. It is pleasing to know that some contributions to “What Next?” have recommended that Sweden be the change that it wishes the world to be. Congratulations for this.

It reminds me of an anecdote that is connected to Mahatma Gandhi, that apostle of peace and wantlessness. A lady with her son once approached him complaining that his son eats too much sugar and Gandhiji should advise him not to do so. Gandhiji told her to come back after a fortnight. When the lady came back Gandhiji advised her son as she wished. Surprised, the lady asked him why he did not give the same advise when she first visited him. Gandhiji replied that he could not have done so unless he had experienced denying sugar to himself.

In sum, changes in social behaviours have to be touched both through example and education. And this costs very little as compared to costs attached to consequences of unbridled technology. Most wars that have been fought in recent past or are currently on the anvil have their sociological basis, and if these sociological phenomenons had been well managed in good time many of the wars or warlike situations could have been avoided. Even now greater attention to sociology can dilute some of the dangerous consequences of struggles and disputes in progress in different parts of the world. If each nation/society was to deny itself those weapons which it does not wish others to possess, the world will be a far safer and better place to live in.

¹ Global Challenges and Responsible Lifestyles: Goram Backstrand and Lars Ingelstane (Development Dialogue: June 2006)

We may thus move towards a better world through:

- a) Increased attention to “positive”/desirable technologies through accelerated funding, increased infrastructure support and encouragement via fiscal incentives etc.
- b) Discouragement of “negative” (undesirable) technologies through curtailed funding and fiscal disincentives etc.
- c) Encouragement of “positive” sociology in terms of changed attitudes, beliefs, etc. in desirable direction through better funding and infrastructure support and fiscal incentives.
- d) Discouragement of “negative” sociology that begets hatred and grudge and gives birth to violence including terrorism through extensive education and mainstreaming of the disoriented.

Choice of these two components of technology and sociology deserving priority attention is not to suggest that other factors, particularly industry and economics, are not important. Technology and sociology deserve priority because technology is a prime mover of socio-economic change and embedded social ethos are the counter weight which respond to technological changes either by very slow degrees or even sometime with a negative response thus causing a drag on the evolving world society. Therefore, what is being emphasized is that technology and sociology are somewhat of primary variables to which other disciplines including industry, finance, information technology, social conduct etc. keep responding. These will have a more positive bearing on the emerging world order if progressively positive technologies and sociology are encouraged and adopted and these moves in tandem in bringing about a better world order. The positive sociology largely has to operate through attitudinal changes including changes in faith and beliefs as it interacts with advancing technologies, which bring with them important changes in the way world is understood and world economy and other world businesses are organized.

But question remains as to who will determine what is “wrong” and “right” technology/sociology. Further, what will be the reference criteria to determine good and not so good technology/sociology? Answers to these questions are in the normative field. Someone has to determine what is good for the world society in the long run which can form the basis for prescriptions for the short run.

Role of U.N.

We hope that in this vast universe there are some wise men who can perform this function. Could UN be the right vehicle? On the face of it this appears to be correct and only feasible option. As it performs these tasks it may also enlarge its own validity by greater democratization of all its processes. It will be able to perform these functions more ably and authoritatively if it commands the trust of more and more people inhabiting the globe.

To begin with all aspects of the UN Charter, of millenium development goals, of child and woman protection and the like can be treated as desirable goals deserving support of positive technology and positive sociology. More may be added through debate and consensus, through a reforming and reformed U.N.

U.N. or a body similar to it appears to be the main hope. It may, if considered expedient, create a separate and independent entity such as the world Parliament to debate and decide on “positive” technology and “positive” sociology keeping in view selected normative goals set for the world society. This institution will then become a guidepost for the direction the world society may take.

The Future

The world society may be likened to a train which has technology as a locomotive and various population groups reflecting a variety of sociologies (attitudes, beliefs, religions, ethnicities with differing levels of technological adoption and advancement etc.) as passengers in different compartments of the train. As things stand whereas technology (engineering, finance, management etc.) as a locomotive may be universal in character the compartments attached to it have different wheel sizes; braking systems, suspensions et al. In due (long) course this meandering world society might ride this train more smoothly than at present. Given the right environment different compartments will improve their individual alignments to the main body of the train and its engine helping it to run more smoothly and with greater speed. With one proviso. If in the meanwhile it does not blow itself up in flames. For this the world society, the arrangements at the U.N. and the wise men of the world may hold themselves responsible. We cannot blame such a catastrophe on the ignorant and the misguided of the world. That will be proof of wise men of the world not being able to manage

“negative” sociology and support and extend “positive” sociology. But, hopefully, such an eventuality will not arise.

This train has been on the move ever since. It has been carrying its rather disoriented baggage and has been readjusting and readapting itself with the time. This train has no particular destination except its destiny in time. As it chugs along, we hope frictional forces will gradually subside and its ride will become smoother, and faster for the benefit of all.

While it is in motion it will require infrastructure support from a world institution. It will need to be done by a body of wise men with a world view. This world institution should be a body to which nation States can look for guidance, advice and even direction. This should be a body to which nation States are willingly agreeable to surrender some parts of their sovereignty. Selective dilution of sovereignty among nation States is almost a sine- qua- non for smooth running of this train – the planet earth.

There is and will be continuous flux inside the compartments/bogeys of this train reflecting problems and issues facing each sub-component of the world society with varying identities of religion, sect, various national and sub-national entities and so forth. It is our hope that these sub-societies will go through this process of flux smoothly or at least with less violence than hitherto duly aided by ‘positive’ sociological support by way of extension education and accelerated funding support and access to economic resources from the world institutional framework. Also a number of obnoxious religious and social practices will fall from grace as liberal education spreads and well being improves. Along the route, most certainly, there will be some cultural loss. Certain cultural practices and even languages may lose their relevance. But that is the price homogenising world society will pay to move forward in time, not only in years but also in millenia.

In charting this journey for the future the wise men of the world through U.N. or any alternate scheme of things such as the world Parliament will need to

- (i) Set the normative goals for the world society;
- (ii) Identify desirable routes to achieve same including actions required globally as well as at specific geographic levels; and
- (iii) Engage nation States in tasks of delivery and implementation, since nation States will continue to be the key actors in this task and are the key resource specially in developing societies.

In performing the above tasks the wise men will have four major resource pillars on which they may draw

- (i) the think tanks and the academics such as Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation;
- (ii) the civil society including voluntary organizations global, transnational, national and local;
- (iii) the media, both electronic and print and
- (iv) business and industry who have of late shown much greater interest in the social concerns of the day.

More attention these support pillars receive, and in turn give to the mission before they world society more the possibilities for a better and brighter future for mankind.

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