

Looking into Interdependence

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Those who consume the bulk of potentially scarce non-renewable resources must think about a measure of self-restraint. An international development strategy cannot assume away the mal-development crises of the North (Western industrialised world) and their often devastating economic, environmental, social and cultural effects in the South (developing world) argues Ignacy Sachs, Professor at France's Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales and Director of the Centre for International Research on Environment and Development. In this paper for the IFDA, of which he is an executive committee member, Sachs maintains that the word "interdependence" arouses suspicion, particularly after the UNCTAD V at Manila and the hardening of attitudes of the developed countries towards the New International Economic Order. He points out that the dismal record of international development cooperation is due to the fact that piecemeal positive measures (such as concessional finance) are more than offset by the working of institutional obstacles, discriminatory policies and obsolete rules of the game. Hence, collective self-reliance should become the centre-piece of the international development strategy.

The meaning of words is loaded with past uses, misuses and co-options. The term "interdependence" entered into the diplomatic vocabulary as a misnomer for asymmetric and irreversible relations between an imperial power and some dependent countries belonging to its sphere of influence. It then resurfaced after 1973, this time denoting the anxiety of the oil importing industrialised countries to set up a privileged commercial and financial relationship with OPEC countries, OPEC oil could be traded against Northern technology, industrial hardware and weaponry; moreover, Northern banks would gladly engage their expertise in recycling petrodollars.

Two corollaries of this call for an exclusive "interdependence" (between a handful of oil importers and exporters) are the hardening of Northern attitudes towards the New International Economic Order (NIEO) and repeated attempts at disrupting the common front of the Third World countries (hence the recent preoccupation with their "differentiation"). No wonder that the word "interdependence" arouses suspicion mostly after UNCTAD V at Manila.

Yet, an international development strategy must address itself not only to the problematic of linkages between North and South, but at a more fundamental level consider the two-way relationship between the local and national development, on the one hand, and the international environ-

ment resulting from the national developments of all countries, on the other. We are thus faced by the twin problems of responsibility for the international implications of national development (or maldevelopment) and of international obstacles to the national development efforts.

International Accountability

We live, for good and for evil, on "only one earth". This is not to say that poor countries and poor people all over the world should stop growing in order to offset the negative environmental impacts of our wasteful life-styles and energy-intensive technologies. On the contrary, those who consume the bulk of potentially scarce non-renewable resources, use directly and indirectly a disproportionately high fraction of arable land and biological resources of the sea, while producing most of the world pollution and heat dissipation must, at last, think about a measure of self-restraint. Unless this happens, the sustainability of economic life on the planet may become endangered. At any rate, an accelerated development of the Third World countries will remain highly problematical if they will have to compete with industrialised countries for scarce resources, while struggling at the same time against the perverse demonstration effects of Northern life-styles and labour-displacing technologies.

An international development strategy cannot assume away the mal-development crises of the North and

their often devastating economic, environmental, social and cultural effects in the South. How to address them is essentially a national question although consultations, exchanges of experiences and concrete forms of international cooperation might be required. But the impacts are bound to be worldwide and, in this sense, the international accountability for national development should be recognized as a tenet of development ethics. Furthermore, all countries from North and South should be accountable to some UN forum and, of course, the Third System as far as the international impacts of their national strategies are concerned, which is not at all contradictory with the principle of national sovereignty.

The UN Secretariat might also envisage, in collaboration with the Third System, to monitor these impacts through special studies aimed at advancing our knowledge about the access to economic and environmental resources, the mechanisms of distribution of economic, social and environmental costs and gains, the progressing depletion of the stock of the capital of nature, the role of communications in fostering imitative growth, etc.

The larger and the richer a country, the bigger are the economic and environmental impacts of its national development (maldevelopment) on the world scene and, therefore, its responsibility for exercising self-restraint as far as the use of scarce resources is concerned. At the same time, national strategies of industrialised countries should strive to create a far larger and more remunerative niche for Third World exports, devising for this purpose more or less demanding adjustment policies. It is only natural that their cost, if any, should be borne by the industrialised countries. In most cases, the moral imperative will coincide with self-enlightened long-term interest.

The principle of international accountability for national development, when applied to Third World countries, should focus on the way in which they foster genuine, socially responsive and environmentally sound development as contrasted

with maldevelopment. In the special case of oil exporters with high per capita revenues, an important criterion might be the degree to which their resources contribute to the strengthening of collective self-reliance and, in this way, to the development of the Third World at large.

Changing the Rules of the Game

However, even far-reaching adjustments at the national strategy level may prove ineffective, or self-defeating for the South, so long as it must rely in its dealings with the North on the present linkage mechanisms in finance, trade, science and technology and communications. The dismal record of international development cooperation is due to the fact that piecemeal positive measures such as concessional finance are more than offset by the working of institutional obstacles, discriminatory policies and obsolete rules of the game. For most Third World countries which are "import-sensitive" and constantly exposed to the perverse demonstration effect of Northern maldevelopment the international environment has been a stumbling block on the way to development if not as a propelling agent of maldevelopment.

That is why the new international development strategy cannot harbour any more the illusion and the wishful thinking so conspicuously present in the first two development decades. In order to be meaningful, it must address itself in depth to all the institutions (in the broadest sense of the term) which act as linkages between the South and the North and, more generally, jointly constitute the international environment for each developing (or maldeveloping) country.

The task is urgent, enormous and the interests involved are highly conflicting. Hence, the only sensible thing to do is to agree on an agenda setting and a timetable for a negotiation package that would address itself to ways of removing existing obstacles, setting up new rules of the game in trade, finance, industrial technical and scientific co-operation and communications, as well as establishing a system for the management of the international commons. We

need Bretton Woods II, Havana II, Stockholm II, Lima II and Vienna II combined in one.

To the extent to which development is a process, an international strategy might well address itself, as a first priority, to ways and means of smoothing this process by improving the institutional linkages between individual countries, groups of countries and the world at large, while realistically recognizing that this task can only be achieved through painful negotiations aimed at resolving the conflicts of interest at present separating the North and the South. It may well be that the North-South

confrontation will only enter into a more constructive phase when the South will demonstrate in deeds the ability to go ahead by itself. That is why collective self-reliance should become the center-piece of the international development strategy.

Mutatis mutandis we are again confronted with the problematique of linkages, institutions and rules of the game. Hopefully, the conflicts of interest among Third World countries will prove weaker, and the political will to succeed stronger, so that collective self-reliance will become a reality in the eighties, changing the whole picture drastically.

