

Wednesday 19.10.07 - What Is Development?

Main prompt questions in italics. Rest are highlights of the discussion; they do not necessarily represent a consensus.

Is development a question of economics (stability etc.) or is it a broader social/personal issue (e.g. reduced infant mortality)?

The USA probably wouldn't be described as a developing economy, but if one cut it up into sections: White, Black and Hispanic then the latter two have a GDP comparable to places that mostly likely would be considered to be developing (e.g. South Africa)*

Can a country be developed without being a politically stable and democratic country?

People easily judge from their own perspective

Is development all relative?

Peru has same level of access for medicine etc as USA in 1950s, but is in a weaker economic position.

Development shouldn't be about creating a capitalist economy..

Brazilian tribe questioned over whether life was preferable in the 1970s before government drives to get them into work in cities, preferred life where food was abundant and disease not present.

Cuba has a relatively developed education and medical institutions without democracy. It has its problems, but all countries have problems, some which Cuba doesn't have.

Development as the freedom to choose one's path through life.

What would be the single best metric of development?

Proportion of women in education: though, this could ensure strictly Islamic countries almost by definition could not develop. *Do we have the right to tell other countries they have to obey 'our' rules if we feel that to not do so would be a defiance of basic human rights?*

Every definition will have holes..

Development must be seen in a context. Developed education? Developed medicine.. countries need not all have boxes ticked.

Being told to develop is a little aggressive - who are some countries to say that they are under developed?

Although a global perspective is important, development must ultimately be on a local level.

Targets must be individual to specific countries

So, what is development?

- Its not GDP
- One simple definition is not useful
- Not what most people automatically think it is.
- I don't know**
- It requires a value judgment. Unfortunately because we need agreement - development must be umbrella and general in its terms.
- Whatever you want it to be.
- Development requires a context.

* It seems that this point is dubious in its accuracy. Nonetheless, the point of poverty in the US remains; it has been said that one in six people in the USA requires food aid to feed themselves.

** At this point, Martyn claimed (somewhat tongue in cheek) that the two phrases he wanted to hear most frequently at U8 discussion groups were, "I don't know" and "Sorry, I was wrong".