UNIT 8: POLITICS OF DEVELOPMENT

UNIT STRUCTURE

8.1 Learning Objectives

8.2 Introduction

8.3. Knowledge and Power in Development Process

8.4 Post-Development Theories

8.5 Critique of Post Development Theories

8.6. Let Us Sum up

8.7 Further Reading

8.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

8.9 Model Questions

8.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- understand the role of knowledge and power in the development process.
- understand the major tenets of post development theories.
- examine the critique of post development theories
- critically understand the pros and cons of each of these perspectives.

8.2 INTRODUCTION

Development is a normative concept referring to a multi-dimensional process. Some scholars argue that development must be spatial-temporal in context. In other words, it should be relative to time, place and circumstance. Development is customarily translated into improvements in certain social indicators and indicators of the (physical) quality of life, such as life expectancy. Ideas of development engender debate over the theoretical and empirical relationships between the rate and pattern of economic growth, the distribution of the benefits and equity. There are a lot of differences among social scientists to arrive at any universal formula of development. There are various common factors despite the divergent views. Some of the factors are-

[a] increased economic efficiency

[b] expansion of national economic capacity

[c] technological advancement

[d] economic and industrial diversification

[e] adaptability in the face of adversity

These factors are generally accepted as necessary conditions if development is to be sustainable cutting across disciplines many social scientists also point to other factors, listed below:–

[f] Changes in social structure, attitudes, and motivation or other specific purposes of economic improvement

[g] increase in Gross National Product (GNP) and average real incomes should be treated as means and not ends.

[h] Increase of general social welfare that encompasses even spiritual and cultural attainment.

The above points are crucial in understanding the true intent of development but the list is not exhaustive in itself. What needs to be emphasized at this juncture is that the mindless pursuit of development through an increase in the income per capita without a thought on how the benefits of growth are distributed in the society, will results in greater income disparities and other inequalities and cannot qualify to be understood as development.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1. Mention two indicators of development.

A handful of billionaires and a majority of population wallowing in abject poverty can never ever be the true intent of development. Unfortunately many scholars point out that the divide between rich and poor is increasingly growing.The traditional approach to development has failed to address the need of the developing countries, hence the need for a new conceptualization of development has arisen. At the level of the individual, development implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being. On the level of the society, development cannot be seen purely as an economic affair, but rather as an overall social progress which is dependent upon the outcome of man's efforts to deal with his natural environment.

The questions to ask about a country's development are therefore:

[i] what has been happening to poverty?

[ii] What has been happening to unemployment?

[iii] What has been happening to inequality?

If all three of these have declined from high levels, then beyond doubt this has been a period of development for the country concerned. If one or two of these central problems have been growing worse, especially if all three have, it would be strange to call the result "development" even if per capita income doubled (Seers 1969, 3).Development in this sense is just not all about growth but all about people. It only ascertains that the gains of growth are redistributed to provide for a better quality of life for everyone. Development is the process by which people create and recreate themselves and their life circumstances to realize higher levels of civilization in accordance with their own choices and values.

However, there are other holistic concerns which go beyond mere quantification of the indicators and have been included in development discourse. Some of these are

[i] Increasing national self-determination, predicated on the notion that development is something a country does to itself and means reducing external dependency,

[ii] notions of environmentally sustainable development, or development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs

[iii] feminist theories of development that emphasizes gender and women's issues specifically.

Democratization, accountable government and a respect for human rights have also recently become more prominent as features of political development contained by the generic sense of development. Development, then, values increased freedom, after all, the most basic for all may be the freedom to define your own needs, taking part in decisions that affects your own life. Truly speaking economic development cannot be merely treated as economic in nature and cannot be divorced from the other aspects of development. It's principal contribution is to enhance the range of human choice for all members of society without discrimination.

Modern observers of the third world argue that whatever else development is, it must be participatory -a "bottom up" exercise where the common people understand, initiate and control the process.

8.3. KNOWLEDGE AND POWER IN DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Undoubtedly Knowledge and power are central to understanding the development process. Kofi Annan, U.N Secretary General has rightly remarked that 'Information does not belong to one ideology or another, knowledge is not the privilege of one creed or conviction. If information and knowledge are central to democracy, they are the conditions for development. It is that simple… It is our duty and our responsibility to see

that gift bestowed on all the world's people, so that all may live lives of knowledge and understanding'.

For any development process to yield positive results there is a need for a robust public policy. It should be kept in mind that a meaningful public policy for larger good is not generated simply by increasing the amount of research on a particular topic .Lot of efforts go in to arrive at the root of the problem as there are complex issues to navigate . The effort is to ensure that the best available knowledge is sourced, interpreted and used to further development goals.

Harry Jones, Nicola Jones, Louise Shaxson and David Walker in their Working and discussion papers of January 2013 titled 'Knowledge, policy and power in international development: a practical framework for improving policy' have pointed out "In other words, defining, selecting and promoting knowledge in policy is an inherently variable and complex process - as much concerned with matters of power and politics as it is with rational debate and problem solving. However, this does not mean that any analysis of the interface is hopelessly context-specific or driven solely by 'political will''. Our work shows that while it is impossible to construct a single one-size-fits-all model, the interface between knowledge and policy is influenced by some common dimensions:

1. The relative strength of actors involved in knowledge production and policy-making, the distribution of their interests on the issue and the interplay of values, beliefs and credibility

2. The salience of the different types of knowledge generated and sought

3. Processes of knowledge interaction - those processes that mediate between sources of knowledge and policy decisions and that can be facilitated by so-called 'knowledge intermediaries'.

The authors have analyzed the political context of the knowledge-policy interface and have outlined the following poser to explain the varied intricacies of the process.

1. Who has the strongest voice in policy debates?
2. What checks and balances are in place to ensure that weaker voices can be heard?
3. How does this vary between different state types?

The above three political contexts are mediated by following factors-

[a] Capacity of institutions to absorb change

[b] External forces

[c] Informal political relationships

[d] Formal political participation

Understanding the checks and balances between different branches of government, and between central and local government, helps clarify processes of policy scrutiny, and how different branches of government are able to source, interpret and use different forms of knowledge.

The opportunities for public debate affect whether non-elites can express their preferences in policy-making processes. Formal political participation is often complemented by informal relationships based on wider social structures or individual personal patronage. How international agreements are debated and implemented by governments may have wider implications for whose evidence base counts in the policy process. How policy-makers interact with a variety of knowledge providers will vary by type of state, with implications for where and when 'policy windows' may open or close.

8.4 POST- DEVELOPMENT THEORIES

The Post-Development Perspective was a strong outcome against western models of development. It became a part of academic concern from 1990s. Theorists from within this perspective are extremely critical of Western models of development, arguing that the earlier development was always unequal, that it never worked for the masses. Moreover these scholars argued that developing countries should find their own pathways to development.

Escobar has been critical about the whole modernization discourse and has flawed it for being ethnocentric.

The basic drawback of these western discourses was that they completely ignored many ancient philosophies and traditions which had worked in poorer countries for thousands of years. According to Escobar this is both arrogant and disrespectful, and created the potential for opposition and conflict.

Escobar argued that the Western model of development justified itself by claiming to be rational and scientific, and therefore neutral and objective. However, in reality, modernisation theory was a top-down approach which treated people and cultures as abstract concepts and statistical figures to be moved up and down in the name of progress. Modernisation theory effectively denied people within developing countries the opportunity to make their own choices and decisions.

Sahlins has argued that Western Aid agencies incorrectly assume that people who lack material possessions are poor and thus unhappy. However, he argued that people in developing world may have few material possessions, but this does not necessarily mean they are poor. The reason behind this flawed understanding is primarily due to the way happiness is perceived in the western world. Concepts like inner peace, spiritual solace, do not fit in the western notion of development. On the contrary to the western understanding these seemingly simple people may actually be

happy because they belong to a supportive community and they have the love of their family. Joint family system accompanied by the network of kinship affiliation is a support which no money can buy in the world. Happiness for them does not lie in the fancied restaurants of the rich but a simple feast of local dishes with their brethren. This idea has been practically applied in Bhutan where development is measured in terms of Gross National Happiness, rather than Gross National Product.

Other post-development thinkers argue that modernist explanations of underdevelopment have rarely sought contributions from sociologists and economists who actually live in the developing world. McKay argued that development strategies are too often in the hands of western experts who fail to take account of local knowledge or skills and that development often has little to do with the desires of the target population.

Post-Development sociologists further argue that Western models of development have created a diverse set of problems for the populations of developing societies. Indigenous peoples have been forcibly removed from their homelands, grave environmental damage is being done to the rainforests, children's labour is being exploited and aggressive marketing of unhealthy products is taking place all over the developing world, all in the name of achieving economic growth and the name of progress.

Some post development sociologists are of the opinion that development is an eyewash as it was never really designed to deal with humanitarian problems. In fact it was about helping the industrial world, especially the United States to maintain its economic and cultural dominance of the world.

Consequently, post-development thinkers argue that we need alternative models of development rather than the industrial-capitalist model promoted by western countries.

The pertinent question that remains is that from a 'Post-Development Perspective - How should developing countries develop?'

Korten argued, to truly realize the full potential of development, it should be people centred, which means that the intended beneficiary and the target population both should have a say in how their communities (and countries) develop and also the people should get a more participatory role in the process of development.

The Nobel laureate Prof. Amartya Sen (1987) is of the view that development needs to be about giving people independence so that they have real power and choice over their day to day situations. It should not be a 'top down' entity coming from the west, via governments and then trickling down to the people.

'People Centered Development' theorists also have a much broader conception of what 'development' could actually mean. They don't believe that development has to mean them becoming more like the West, nor that development should be seen in narrow terms such as industrialising and bringing about economic growth. Development projects should be much more diverse, and should facilitate the people living in developing countries. These theorists reject western definitions of 'underdevelopment' - just because some cultures are rural, non-industrialised, and not trading, does not mean they are inferior.

Vandana Shiva is a good example of a theorist who comes under the umbrella of a People Centred Development approach to development. She has spent much of her life in the defence and celebration of biodiversity and indigenous knowledge. The concept of seed freedom is central to Shiva's work. It means the rejection of corporate patents on seeds, and protecting the rights of local peoples to save their own seed. Vandana Shiva has also played a major role in the global Ecofeminist Movement. According to her 2004 article *'Empowering Women',* Shiva suggests that a more sustainable and productive approach to agriculture can be achieved through reinstating a system of farming in India that is more centered on engaging women. She advocates against the prevalent "patriarchal logic of exclusion."

People-centered development rejects the anthropocentric humanism of the Enlightenment. It values people's cultural andspiritual respect for the places and natural systems, including the Earth and the Universe itself, to which people belong. It holds that, insofar as the natural environment belongs to anyone, it belongs to all people not just to the rich and powerful.Because of its support for diversity, there are many different paths to development within the Post Development/ People Centred Development perspective.

Some of the models of development which preach a similar view are listed below:

- Socialist models of development - where governments control most aspects of economy and aim towards justified redistribution of resources.
- Indigenous peoples maintaining traditional lifestyles, effectively rejecting most of what the west has to offer is also something post-development perspectives support, as in the example of Bhutan.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 2. Which country has adopted Gross National Happiness as a measure of development?

Q 3. State True or False

'People Centered Development' approach have a broader conception of 'development'. They don't believe that development has to mean them becoming more like the West and development shouldn't be seen in narrow terms such as industrialisation and economic growth only.

8.5 CRITIQUE OF POST DEVELOPMENT THEORIES

The post development critique of development discourse has by now been widely discussed and criticised. Post development texts have been interpreted as a cynical legitimation of neoliberalism or a futile romanticisation of premodern times. More sympathetic critics have at least acknowledged its potential to criticise the shortcomings of development theory and policy.

It is pointed out that a new way of thinking about development began in 1949 with President Harry Truman's declaration: "The old imperialism-exploitation for foreign profit-has no place in our plans. What we envisage is a program of development based on the concepts of democratic fair dealings." While claiming that the "era of development" began at this point, post development theorists do not suggest that the concept of development was new. What was new was the definition of development in terms of an escape from underdevelopment. Since the latter referred to two-thirds of the world, this meant that most societies were made to see themselves as having fallen into the undignified condition of "underdevelopment", and thus to look outside of their own cultures for salvation.

Development, according to these critics, was now a euphemism for post-war American hegemony; it was the ideals and development programs of the United States and its (Western) European allies that would form the basis of development everywhere else.

All the other theories argue that, eventually, if a poor country really wants to improve the lives of its people in the long term, it needs money, this can only come from industrialisation and trade, is it really possible to improve standards of living through small scale projects?

Focusing solely on small scale development projects still leaves local communities in developing countries relatively poor compared to those in the West, is this really social justice?

In a globalising world it simply is not realistic to expect developing countries to be able to tackle future problems if they remain underdeveloped - eventually population growth or climate change or refugees or drugs or loggers are going to infiltrate their boarders, and it is much easier to respond to these problems if a country has a lot of money, a well-functioning state and a high level of technology.



8.6. LET US SUM UP

- That there is a varied understanding of the term development. Social scientists have been grappling with the issue in both form and content.
- The term development and its understanding have undergone tremendous changes. From being a merely economic factor, it has included all facets of life.
- To measure development it is essential to understand that merely reducing it to a western understanding would be a gross injustice to mankind.
- Development must include within its ambit theme like Social Justice; Inclusivity and most importantly bottom up approach and, not top down.
- The whole planning process should be designed with communities living in developing countries, and not by western experts.
- It is vitally necessary that national policies,especially in rich-countries, be reoriented to support people-centered,ecologically sustainable development. This would be in the interest of the entire world, including the citizens of the rich countries. For example, systemsof subsidies and taxation must be restructured to discourage pollution and wasteof resources, reduce the costs of employing people so that more jobs will be created, and enable people to do useful and rewarding unpaid work as analternative to paid employment.

8.7 FURTHER READING

Agarwal, B. (1985) 'Women, Poverty and Agricultural Growth in India', The Journal of Peasant Studies, Vol. 13, No 4, pp 165-220.

_____ (1989) 'Rural Women, Poverty and natural resources: Sustenance, Sustainability and Struggle for Change', Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 24, No 3, WS 46-WS112.

_____ (1994) 'Gender and Command Over Property: A Critical Gap In Economic Analysis and Policy in South Asia', World Development, Vol. 22, No 10, pp 1455-1478.

_____ (1995) A field of One's Own: Gender and Land rights in South Asia, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

8.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Technological advancement, Increased economic efficiency

Ans to Q No 2: Bhutan

Ans to Q No 3: True

8.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) Short Questions (Answer each question within 150 words)

Q1. Why is it important to take non -economic factors into development process?

Q2. What are the positive and negative effects of globalising process on developing countries?

B) Long Questions (Answer each question in about 300-500 words)

Q1. What are the prime reasons for criticism of development theories? Which are the factors which need to be included for a complete understanding of the process?

Q2. What is post development perspective? Why is it important to take gender concern in development perspectives?

** ** **