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## FACT SHEET

# DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVES

When the word 'developed' is applied to groups of people or countries, people often have something in mind. They might think that a developed country is one where there is peace and a good standard of living, and a less developed one can be where there are few services and the people are not so happy. However, you can be economically poor and yet happy, and materially rich but quite miserable, so the term 'developed' when it applies to a whole country can be a bit misleading: exactly what is meant by this term and who or what is it being applied to. At this point, some history about the meaning of the term is useful.

After World War Two, in his inaugural speech to the nation, U.S. President Henry Truman described much of the world that was not industrialised as being 'underdeveloped' and from this, other world leaders started to describe parts of the world as 'developed' and other parts as 'undeveloped' or even 'under-developed'. For many people who were now classed as undeveloped, they had never before thought that they were 'less developed' or 'less fortunate', in fact, for many people they had thought just the opposite. For example, the Chinese people in the 1800s referred to Europeans as 'uncivilised barbarians' as they seemed to have such a short history of civilisation compared to China's. It is from Truman's speech that we have the dominant perspective that 'development' means to become industrialised and materially rich, usually with the help of technology. This perspective meant that an unfortunate system of labelling became the set practice, and it is only been since the 1970s that there have been challenges to this economic perspective of what it means to be 'developed'.

In the 1950s, and through to the 1970s, 'development' was largely measured by a country's economic output, in the figure of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per year. A richer country was seen as more 'developed' than one that produced less. But GDP did not give a very accurate picture as it just showed economic output and people began to ask for more indicators about a country so that a better picture of the welfare of the people of a country could be established. Indicators like life expectancy and the literacy rate could tell people if the country had a good health or education system. A result of this was that the Human Development Index, (HDI) was created. It is a combination of four different indicators that are calculated to get a number, from 0 to 1. The closer the HDI figure is to 1, the more developed a country is presumed to be.

Even so, how could you tell if the country was fair, had a good record of human rights or if the people were satisfied with their leaders? How could you tell if the wealth and services were distributed evenly across the country? The HDI is a good indicator, but it still leaves things in doubt. In the 1990s many more ideas came up about how to measure if a country was progressing, or developing. Another example is the Real Progress Indicator, which includes in its calculations such matters as a country's crime rate and its environmental status.

One of the key problems that people had was that the very term 'developed' could mean so many different things, and often the view that leaders or politicians had was quite different from what ordinary people had. In the 1980s some societies started to see that economic development was in many ways unfair and often damaging to the environment, and they started to question if economic progress was 'development' at all. Several groups proposed different models and perspectives on what it meant to become developed.

This fact sheet is too brief for a full discussion on the many challenges to the economic perspective of development, but three important perspectives are given here as examples:

### 1. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

For those concerned that economic progress had been carried out by the plundering of the environment, the United Nations Brundtland Report 'Our Common Future' released in 1987, was a sign that other perspectives were being considered. The report was the first global strategic policy to include the ecology as a core concept of development. For many environmentalists, this was the first step on the road to more sustainable development.



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## DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVES FACT SHEET

GEC WEBSITE HOME

RELEVANT LINKS

### 2. GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT

In 1970 Ester Boserup published her book on women and development "Women's Role in Economic Development", and it challenged the precept that the economic development process affected men and women equally. There were many different perspectives regarding the role of women towards development and what it meant for them, but by the end of the 1990s the various perspectives had come together under approach, Gender and Development. This emphasis shifted the focus to addressing and transforming unequal gender relations as a means to achieve women's empowerment.

### 3. INDIGENOUS RIGHTS PERSPECTIVES

In pursuit of developing their economies, many governments had disregarded the cultures and land occupation of many of the world's indigenous peoples. Dams had been built that flooded whole communities, forests had been felled displacing people and indigenous, non-economic culture was not respected. The 1970s saw many protests and resistance to resettlement programs as indigenous people were worried about what was happening to their land and culture. The United Nations established a Working Group on Indigenous people in 1982, and ten years later at the Earth Summit in 1992, Principle 22 of the Rio Declaration stated that "indigenous people and their communities have a vital role in environmental management and development because of their knowledge and traditional practices". This was a remarkable turn-around in a few years and the result of this, and many other declarations has been the inclusion of the indigenous perspective in the development plans of many communities.

These three examples are part of a broadening approach to development that has taken place since the 1970s. The widening of the term 'development' began by critiques from people dissatisfied with the narrow view of economic development, then acceptance by those involved in development and lastly, by governments themselves.

In spite of these more inclusive approaches, the development perspective in the global context is still less diverse in reality. For many governments the dominant meaning behind 'development' is still to stress economic development, in the hope that other benefits will 'trickle down'. Government plans may be more accommodating to various groups, but often the dominant perspective remains that of producing more goods and services, to gain a higher material standard of living, rather than addressing social, political or environmental needs and aspirations.

### WEBSITES

#### Development Indicators

<http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/>

[www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org)

[www.gapminder.org](http://www.gapminder.org)

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