

# **Human Development Strategies and Human Development Reports on the Pacific: A viable alternative – or just another development?**

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## **Alternative Development: A new way forward - or a reassertion of the old?**

Alternative development has emerged as a broad collection of ideas and ideals linked by the objective of pursuing participatory, sustainable and just development. Some claim that alternative development represents a break with ‘mainstream’ development thinking and practice and is a distinct shift in the way development is theorised and implemented. Essentially, it is claimed, alternative development is development that is people-centred, empowering and underlain with principles of partnership. Brohman (1996:334) states that, above all, the alternative development approach seeks ‘relatively equitable income distribution, basic-needs provisions, human resource development, popular participation and democratisation, socially and spatially balanced growth, and cultural and environmental sustainability’. In many regards these ideas are indeed seen as alternative, that is, they signify a shift from top-down, bureaucratic mass development toward ‘creating development appropriate needs and interests of the popular majority in Third World countries’ (Brohman, 1996:324). However, alternative development represents a reformist rather than a rejectionist position vis-à-vis mainstream development. Alternative developmentalists still see a role for the state, institutions and external expertise, but intervention must be made more ‘relevant’ (Edwards, 1989), inclusive and based upon people as subjects rather than objects. This call for development to be renewed has resulted from a reaction to what many see is a crisis in development and in global capitalism (Korten, 1990; Mander and Goldsmith, 1996).

In staking the need for change, the Bretton Woods actors, multinational corporations, globalisation, free trade and development ‘experts’ come in for particular rebuke and, at times, ridicule. This is despite the increasingly similar positions, at least on paper, between mainstream and alternative development (especially when such ideas are institutionalised as exemplified in the Human Development Reports). Depending upon one’s position, this may be the result of alternative ideas successfully impacting on most key development agencies, or perhaps it reflects that alternative ideas are as much part of mainstream development thought than is openly admitted. Nevertheless, a set of dichotomies is often established: the answer to the perils of globalisation is a turn to the local (Mander and Goldsmith, 1996); while mainstream development is rigid, alternative development is popular (Brohman, 1996); democratic (Clarke, 1991); environmentally just (Sharp, 1995); empowering (Chambers, 1983; 1997) and is based upon voluntary action (Korten, 1990). Korten even refers to this change as representing a paradigm shift with regard to theory: alternative development thus represents the ‘third paradigm’ and claims to redefine the means and ends of development. This further necessitates a methodological and epistemological revolution ‘removing the conceptual blinders and methodological straitjackets of conventional thinking in favour of a broader, more flexible vision of development capable of addressing diverse Third

World realities' (Brohman, 1996:324). Others however, challenge this view and prefer to see alternative development more as a 'roving critique' of, and within, the mainstream development industry, signifying a 'loosely connected series of alternative proposals and methodologies' rather than a 'theoretical break with mainstream development' (Pieterse, 1998:345). In short, a recognisable form of development is still pursued, but through different means and by different actors.

A further distinction is also made over who leads development. In mainstream development this has shifted over time and place from development being a state-initiated and organised objective to having a more market-led focus. Throughout though, the most significant trustees have been international institutions established in the immediate post-war period to facilitate and guide development, principally through aid, increased trade, research and policy advice/expertise. In alternative development, development is said to be people-centred and therefore emanates from 'civil society'. However, even alternative development must be 'led' – and consequently cannot escape issues of interventionism and trusteeship. In this case the primary agents of change are non-government organisations (NGOs), the proliferation of which reflects a desire for alternatives to 'top-down' conventional development, and the resources to do so. This new popular form of organisation and expertise however deserves greater scrutiny, if, for no other reason, NGOs now are significant actors in the development industry *including* as consultants and service providers to many of the organisations alternative developmentalists commonly fingered as being the problem in the first place (e.g. The World Bank, various ODA programmes etc.).

In this paper I attempt to do three things. First, I critique the hypothesis that alternative development represents a *better* development. In doing this I employ a recent critical historical approach to development advanced by (the late) Michael Cowen and Robert Shenton, which argues that development was an invention of nineteenth century intellectual thought that sought to find a way to marry rapid and significant change (progress) with order through guided intent. Trusteeship was the means by which natural progress and change could be harnessed to modernity and linear improvement, controlled, and directed by others. Development doctrine thus married development to trusteeship. Consequently, in seeking to renew development through guided intent, even alternative development could be considered as merely rehashing the old while heralding the new, for it does not escape the conundrum of trusteeship. Secondly, and with reference to this critical approach, I will review two institutionalised examples of alternative development, namely the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Pacific Human Development Reports of 1994 and 1999. These reports are interesting to compare, both relative to the debate of mainstream 'versus' alternative development, as well as with one another. Finally, I conclude on the impact and effect of development as doctrine in the Pacific (including mainstream, alternative, popular etc.) by drawing upon David Gegeo's work on indigenous epistemologies and ask: is alternative development a better development or just another form of conventional development, bound to result in the same problems and limitations?

### **The UNDPs Pacific Human Development Reports: 1994 & 1999**

In this section I will examine two widely cited and read documents on human development in the Pacific, which represent one institutional voice of alternative development in the region. Both of these reports contain much of the essence of an alternative development approach. Prominence is placed in both on sustainable human development which 'places people at the centre of development ... [seeking] to bring development into balance with the coping capacities of societies and the carrying

capacities of nature' (UNDP, 1994:iii). This is seen as a necessary counter to the internal and external challenges that these small island states and societies face, as well as the defining, especially by 'conventional' development actors, the region's development in terms of economic growth and formal sector activity. A faith in saving societies from one form of development, though in order to pursue another, is evident throughout. Indeed, in noting regional policy concern for people's welfare and the continued strength of indigenous communities, the 1994 report notes that PICs were 'still in a position to avoid the development path that leads to widespread human deprivation, which is now the prevalent condition of many developing countries' (UNDP, 1994:6).

In both reports there is a focus on advocating people-centred development and this is seen as the 'ultimate objective of development' (though this was more explicit in the 1994 report). (UNDP, 1999:5). There is a clear critique of an economic-growth approach and a focus on creating greater capabilities for populations in which human development is both an ends and a means. Both reports are underlain with the claim that there is a natural affinity between people-centred development and Pacific communities (UNDP, 1994:iii;). Additionally, development can be secured through redefining partnerships between institutions and institutions, away from a conventional or mainstream policies of economic growth and towards participatory development, characterised by closer collaboration and shared interests between governments, communities and NGOs (UNDP, 1994:1).

A central place is given to organised participation in both reports. In 1994 the UNDP stressed that: 'another key step towards ensuring sustainable human development is increased participation by communities and individuals. ...The report discusses NGO involvement in the Pacific for more people-centred development, and it urges maximum use of rural-based and urban community organisations to allow for more effective participation' (UNDP, 1994:3). The key strategies in achieving alternative development are increased participation and empowerment, and much attention and importance is placed on NGOs and people's organisations to bring this about.

While comparing the 1994 and 1999 reports does reveal similar strands, both focussing on standard sectoral issues such as population; education; health; gender; inequality; and the environment, there are also some notable differences. The 1994 report can be considered the more classic alternative development text. Its main focus is in clearly defining and calling for a people-centred approach. In contrast, the 1999 report is narrower in its focus. In fact, the latter report, with its emphasis on data collection and quantification, increased opportunity through micro-enterprise development, and good governance can be considered remarkably similar to recent World Bank reports on the region which call for greater human development through economic growth (World Bank, 1996). For example, in its forward, the 1999 report notes that 'countries that do well in terms of economic growth usually do well in human development, and vice versa. Countries that do poorly usually do so in both respects' (UNDP, 1999:xi).

### **The UNDPs Pacific Human Development Reports: A break from the mainstream – or just another development?**

I would like to conclude by re-examining these reports through revisiting the principle of intentional development and trusteeship as developed by Cowen and Shenton (1996) and also the work developed by David Gegeo (1998) on indigenous epistemology and its relationship to empowerment and rural development in the Solomon Islands.

As noted earlier, alternative ideas of development have become popular as Western domination and control of the Third World, through development, has been increasingly denounced and renounced. 'That development be westernisation and modernisation', which is argued to be endemic in conventional development theory and practice, spurs much activity to argue, define and fight for an alternative. But does alternative development really constitute a break from the past or from the mainstream, and does it escape the implicit faith that there is a proper course of development which can, and should, be guided by intent? (Cowen and Shenton, 1996:453). Additionally, does (and how?), alternative development (and its agencies) escape trusteeship: that is, those who deem themselves to be developed take it upon themselves to determine the process of development for those who are deemed to be less developed (Cowen and Shenton, 1996:4). To what extent do the alternative and people-centred texts of the UNDP on the Pacific simply re-impose notions of development and trusteeship, albeit through substituting the trustees and seeking to re-invent development as freedom, rather than servitude (for example through a focus on participation, empowerment, capacity, increased capabilities etc.). Have the managers of development simply been replaced, from the state and the World Bank, to NGOs and the United Nations? Do alternative developmentalists simply re-assert conventional goals of progress and the need to confront chaos and disorder, though through different activities and organisations? Consider the following passage from the 1994 report:

The countries of the Pacific are undergoing the transition from traditional subsistence-based societies to modern monetary-based ones. Human development policies must focus on the management of this transition.... [A human development approach] seeks to define appropriate development paths for individual countries, development paths that protect and promote the strengths of traditional cultures and support systems, while at the same time fostering the improvement of living standards (UNDP, 1994:2-3).

The theme of the Pacific Human Development Reports is that progress can be made consistent with an 'indigenous' conception of social order. David Gegeo, in his study of indigenous epistemology, change, and rural development in the Solomon Islands demonstrated how, for the West Kwara'ae, indigenous understanding of change was rooted in continual renewal, being alive (both in a biological and cultural sense) and 'living straight'. Modernisation, and development, as concepts applied and conceptualised by Anglo-Saxons, were not relevant to those West Kwara'ae notions of development that guided their practice. The goal of this development was completeness, contentment, or 'headness', i.e. the fulfilment of fundamental human needs broadly categorised as making up the good life, spiritually, psychologically, and physically. In these terms, West Kwara'ae already know what (their) development is and how to seek it. Indeed, Gegeo makes the point that West Kwara'ae have about 30 words that could be ascribed to development, or *diflopmen*, but that are distinct from western notions of development, that equate more to *bisnis* (or capitalism). It is *bisnis* that is negatively equated with development, whether it be in the form of outside or 'other' knowledge, projects and even notions of community and participation. These are 'something that enters from the outside', and result in 'dead', selfish, empty and alien outcomes, that are distinct from West Kwara'ae concepts of *diflopmen*.

Gegeo's study is interesting and relevant because, while it does not reject alternative forms of development *per se*, it does reinforce the limitations of development doctrines that have emerged from western thought and experience. While Gegeo's study did leave room for alternative forms of development to tap into indigenous notions and practice of

*diflopmen* such a position runs the risk of simultaneously resisting and embracing 'development' through failing to appreciate development's historical logic and employ, as the bridge between progress and order, and as the means by which to assert intentional over immanent (or indigenous/authentic) change. In this context, *alternative* development is no such thing, it is merely another form of development locked into the same historical basis of thought and action as so-called 'conventional' or 'mainstream' development (indeed, it plays a fundamental part in its renewal).

The Pacific Human Development Reports of 1994 and 1999, though in different ways, reflect and do not escape the desire to intentionally use development as an antidote to chaos and disorder wrought by change, notably through institutional 'alternatives'. Indeed, while these 'new' ideas are seen as authentic development they are nothing of the sought. Though through different actors and means, development's connection with modernity, progress and order, facilitated through directed change is re-imposed, though the nature and source of trusteeship may be different. Gegeo's indigenous epistemologies guiding and seeking contentment and completeness, or, authentic development (in the West Kwara'ae sense) are not sought as ends, but rather as means to 'another' development.

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