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The Declined 'Country Ownership' in International Development Discourse: A Rhetorical Analysis

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Abstract

Since 1945, after the decline of cold war it was a common wisdom that most developing countries would catch up with the level of economic development and social welfare achieved by industrialized countries by imitating their model of development. Soon the common wisdom withered away and it was globally felt that utterly imitation of development model of developed countries will not result in economic development. So a major change in economic approach and consequently in development discourse took place. International Financial Institutions (IFIs) like World Trade Organization, World Bank and International Monetary Fund emphasized on Trade Liberalization and Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) in the development discourse and prescribed it for developing countries. But due to its inherent nature of exogenous development programs, governments of developing countries at the national levels lost their maneuverability in formulating, implementing, and evaluating national programs and policies. International development discourse, therefore, has declined 'Country Ownership' in the development strategies. In this context, this paper considers World Development Report 1980 and World Development Report 1990 as international development discourse. Using Escobar and Foucalt's conceptualization of development discourse and Buiter's concept of 'Country Ownership' this paper argues that international development discourse has declined 'country ownership'. The paper also investigates how international development discourse marginalizes local inclusion in the development programs and consequently analyzes how it turns out to be anti-developmental for developing countries.

Introduction

The embeddedness of economic theory in the international development discourse fails to take local dynamics of society, economy, politics and

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culture at the national level of developing countries into account. So the "one-size-fits-all" international development strategy, rather than ensuring economic growth, tends to fossilize the economic growth of developing countries inhibiting all endogenous opportunities of growth. Moreover, the conditionalities shrined in international development strategies pose more difficulties for the developing countries in their way of attaining economic growth. The socio-economic condition of Sub-Saharan African states, for example suggests the failure of development project to raise the quality of life on the continent. Arrighi captures the abundant assessments of the effects of underdevelopment that are in the political economy literature on Africa in the statement "over the quarter of a century, the African crisis of the late 1970 has been transformed into the African tragedy" (2002:5). The Economist (2000) in its May (13-19) analyzes the African Tragedy as 'The hopeless continent'. UNDP more elaborately captures the African crisis in the assessment statement of 1980s decade" (1996:17). The decade of the 1980s was... the lost decade for Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa' (Ibid). African leader voiced "The effect of unfulfilled promises of global development strategy has been more sharply felt in Africa than in other continents of the world" (Ibid). The concept of local dynamics of society, economy, culture and politics refers to the country ownership which has not been taken into account while devising international development strategies embodied with conditionalities for developing countries. Therefore, international development discourse has declined country ownership resulting in anti-developmental for developing countries. In this context, this paper argues that international development discourse has declined 'country ownership' in the development strategies for developing countries.

Methodology

In order to investigate the declined 'country ownership' in the international development discourse World Bank Development Report 1980 and World Bank Development Report 1990 has been critically analyzed. More precisely, the language, power & symbol and economic concepts & theories of these two reports have been carefully analyzed in the light of country ownership. In addition, the investigation also concentrates on finding out how the absence of country ownership has led international development discourse to be anti-developmental for the developing countries marginalizing the maneuverability of developing countries in formulating, implementing and evaluating national development programs and policies at the national level.

Development Discourse

Foucault's conceptualization of discourse has been squarely used to define development discourse. Being deeply influenced by cultural studies, Foucault tried to understand discourse at the level of society as a whole. As noted by Peet and Hartwich (1999) "Foucault was particularly interested in the careful, rationalized, organized statements made by experts what he called discourse. Foucault's idea of discourse is the underpinning that helps to examine the rhetoric of international development discourse" (pp:129-130). According to Melkote, development is a theoretical process that aims to provide people with access to appropriate and sustainable opportunities that will allow then to improve their lives and the lives of others in their community (2003:129,137). Accordingly, Arturo Escobar (1995) describes development discourse as the process by which the social reality of development theory comes into being as a paradigm (p:78). Both Foucalt and Escobar's conceptualization of development discourse conceives the notion of society as a whole. Foucalt tries to understand the texture and nature of the social multidimensional factors. Escobar, on the other hand considers development as the social reality which implies understanding this social reality is the prerequisite of development. Therefore, the most noteworthy aspect is both Foucalt and Escobar's strong suggestion on understanding the local social reality for which development discourse needs to be deconstructed taking local languages and symbols, power relations, economic components into account. Therefore, development discourse is to be country-owned, not an exogenous imposition.

Country Ownership: Development Within Buiter (2004) argues, unless an IMF program and the conditionality it embodies are country-owned, the program will fail or unless an IMF program and the conditionality it embodies are country-owned, the program deserves to fail (p: 226). Country ownership is a property of programmes, processes, plans or strategies involving both a 'domestic' party (generally a nation state) and a foreign party. Some of the programs or strategies to be defined as development discourse following Foucalt and Escobar's conceptualization include the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), the World Bank's and IMF's Highly Indebted Poor Country Initiative (HIPC) and World Bank's Structural Adjustment Program (SAP). Buiter uses the term 'country ownership' to describe both positive and normative features of international financial institution (IFI) programmes. For Buiter, country ownership can refer to a number of dimensions of multidimensional relationship of the domestic party to the program/process and its conditionality (Ibid: 224). Buiter's conceptualization of 'country ownership' is determined by any or more of the following features:

1. The country has designed and drafted the program; or its weaker siblings, ranging from 'The country has had a significant involvement in the drafting and design of the program' to ' The authorities of the country were informed of the program after it had been drawn up by other parties, typically of the World Bank and IMF.

2. The country agrees with the objectives of the program.
3. The country believes that the implementation of the program as envisaged will achieve the program's objectives.
4. 'The country implements the program' or its weaker siblings, ranging from 'The country plays a significant role in the implementation of the program' to 'The authorities of the country are kept informed of how and when the program has been implemented' (Ibid: 224).

For a country to own a development strategy, the county needs to have institutions for political and economic governance that are representative and legitimate voice to 'speak for the country' or 'to represent the interests of the country'.

Buiter (2004) contextualizes three situations in which countries seek exogenous assistance.

1. They need external financial resources and cannot access these through the markets, because they are not credit worthy.
2. They need external expertise and do not have the resources to pay for this on market terms.
3. They need an external commitment device because of weak domestic political institutions (p: 225).

Buiter further argues, countries that need one or more of these external assistances - finance, expertise, commitment - are countries that are in trouble, countries that cannot help themselves, countries that are in a mess (2004: 225). Countries that are in trouble or mess are subject IFI development programs and thereby constrained by anti-developmental nature of the development program or discourse.

International Development Discourse as 'Anti-developmental'

Within the social sciences and in the mindset of Western people, development arguably remains as a vehicle for modernism. The 'post' within post-development refers to the conviction that it is not a matter of identifying the most efficient way of delivering development, but questioning the very concept of development (McGregor, 2007:156). At prima facie, there appears to be little dispute over the contents and desirability of development in the post-World War II era. Development is generally understood as the intervention of aid structures and practices that would lead to rising living standards, manifested in an increase in income, which in turn would render better health and nutrition. This sympathetic vision has legitimized the rise of the development industry comprised of institutions, processes, discourses, and knowledge's, which have systemically attempted to help those 'underdeveloped' nations into idealized societies modeled after 'developed' nations in the West. Global campaigns, such as 'Make Poverty History' promote greater intervention by privileged societies into the developing world. In response to the uncritical acceptance of development, the last twenty years has seen the emergence of what can be broadly called post-modern critiques against Western development Schemas (Ibid:157).

Within the last twenty years, there has been a sprouting of literature that rejects the very meaning of development. This body of scholarship, inspired by Michel Foucault and the post-structuralist school of thought, problematizes the political and power aspects of what can be seen at face value as a neutral and practical problem–how to deliver the technological and institutional advances of the First World to 'poor' people in the subaltern (Nusted, 2001: 482).Vexation over development is evident in statements which identify it to be "a ruin in the intellectual landscape," and that it now "shows cracks and is starting to crumble" (Sachs, 1992:1). Several scholars who assert this caustic view towards development are collectively referred to as first wave 'post-development theorists' (Alvares, 1992; Escobar, 1985, 1992, 1995). This new chorus of critical theory proposes that development itself is an arbitrary concept rooted in a meta-narrative that, in turn, only benefits its practitioners. Post-development theorists maintain that the real aim of development is intimately linked to modernization, which broadens the control of the Western world and its nationalist allies within the 'developing' world (Rapley, 2004: 350).

Post-development theory has also been characterized as 'beyond development' and 'anti-development 'for its disruption of development's reductive nature. Development was subsequently rejected because its discourse essentialized non-Western cultures into their deficiencies, and thus portrayed it as a region in need of modernizing along Western models (Constantino, 1985; Nandy, 1988; Kothari, 1988; Rist, 1990). First-wave post-development theorists suggest that development processes undermine and destroy the diversity of social, cultural, economic, and political systems that pre-dated development, and were consequently replaced with externally imposed homogenous models of society. Inversing the logic of development, Sachs (1992) argues that we should not be afraid of development's failures, but rather its success. Escobar (1992) proposes that the problem with development is that it is external, based on the teleological path of the industrialized world, and 'more endogenous discourses' are needed instead. The assertion of 'endogenous development' harkens to dependency theory and asserts that "foreign is bad, local is good" (Kiely, 1999: 30-55). Escobar summarizes the hallmarks of the first wave of post-development theory: (1) an interest not in development alternatives, but in alternatives to development, and thus a rejection of the entire paradigm, (2) an interest in local and indigenous knowledge, (3) a critical stance towards established scientific discourses, and (4) the defense and promotion of localized, pluralistic grassroots movements (1995: 215). Escobar’s concept of ‘an interest in local and indigenous knowledge’ clearly refers to the inclusion of local agents since without the inclusion of local agents, it is impossible to understand local knowledge. Buiter (2004) argues, the exclusion of local agents in the development discourse is variegated, yet multidimensional. The local agents whose actions are necessary for the program to succeed are, however, not necessarily those who speak for the country in the meeting or consultative processes where these programs are drafted and the conditionality is designed. Again those on whom the success of the programs depends may not include all those affected by it. Often the majority of those affected by a program have had no voice in the design of the conditionality, and the program may not serve their interests, regardless of whether their efforts are essential to its success. If this is the reality in a country that is a candidate for a program, it is beyond the ability of the IMF, World Bank, or other IFIs to remedy it. The effective choice for the IFIs is then between not having a program and having one that is not ‘country owned’ in the sense of not in the interest of and supported by the majority of the population. Therefore, a common thread found in this first wave of post development theory is that it derides development as a Eurocentric discourse and advocates for new ways of thinking about non-Western countries. From this post-development perspective the indicators of anti-developmental are exclusion of local dynamics, imposition of development strategies, and destruction of local identities.

Rhetorical Analysis: Tracing ‘Country Ownership’

Rhetoric of development discourse exhibits its appreciation of third world or developing countries. The sensuousness and glossiness of development discourse clearly reveals how the developed countries have appreciated the third world countries while devising development strategies for them neglecting ‘country ownership’ at the core. Therefore, rhetoric analysis of World Development Report 1980 and World Development Report 1990 has been critically analyzed to investigate the decline of country ownership in the World Development Reports.

The World Development Report 1980

To establish its development strategy, the World Bank publishes a yearly World Development Report, which describes current economic development challenges, and identifies strategies to accomplish development goals. Drawing on previous World Bank experience, the Report seeks to identify the causes and effects of progress in human development (1980, iii). The first part of the World Development Report 1980 focuses on the economic policy choices facing both developing and developed countries, and the implications of these choices for growth (1980, iii). This section looks specifically at the use of economic adjustment policies intended to redistribute payments imbalances. The second (and significantly larger) section considers how human development can work in tandem with adjustment policies to reduce poverty (1980, iii). Heavily concentrated on economic adjustment policies, the World Development Report 1980 advocates the development as an exogenous imposition through economic policies mostly designed by the developed countries. This exogenous imposition of economic policies clearly neglects the local inclusion in the program design.

Language, Symbols, & Power

In the global context of rising oil prices and mounting debts, the overall language of the *Report* reveals urgency in addressing the immediate and long-term needs of the developing world. The language in the *Foreword* section, and the title 99 "this Third World Development Report" refers to the developing world as the "third world", which strongly defines the exogenous stance of the first world while designing developing programs (1980, iii). The use of term 'third world' does not necessarily mean the inferior position of the third world, it is rather with the very sense 'they are third world and we need to do something for them'. This characterization implies that the developing world is needy, requiring policy intervention. In the context of the failure of the Basic Needs approach of the 1970s, McNamara suggests that both growth and aid are necessary for the effective redistribution of wealth:

> While there is now increasing recognition that growth does not obviate the need for human development and other steps to reduce poverty, it must be stressed that the converse is true as well – direct steps to reduce poverty do not obviate the need for growth. This *Report* emphasizes that the direct attack on poverty, if it is ultimately to be successful, must be combined with measures to ensure that the economies of the developing countries continue to expand (1980, iii).

The World Bank paints a grim picture of the developing world without growth: "An unfavorable world economic environment casts shadows over the lives of people in developing countries; the poorest in particular face acute hardships" (1980:32). The Report suggests that "without rapid growth, hundreds of millions of very poor people will live and die with little or no improvement in their lot" (1980:13). Thus, in the World Bank discourse of 1980, the idea that underdevelopment is a deficient standard of living is reified.

Having identified the problem of underdevelopment, the report calls on the industrialized nations to help resolve it. As described in the first part of the report: The developing countries face formidable obstacles on the way to rapid growth – many of which – many of which they will have to overcome themselves. But through their policies on trade, aid and other capital flows, the industrialized countries and the capital-surplus oil exporters have a striking impact on how much the developing countries can accomplish (Ibid). The complete text reinforces the role of the developed world as the principal facilitator of international growth and poverty alleviation through trade, fiscal policy, and foreign direct investment. There is no mention, however, of the role of developing nations in this process. Rather, developing nations are portrayed as incapable of contributing to their own development, and therefore as having no ownership in this process. Instead, developing countries are conceived to be the “project” of other nations who have already benefited from capitalism.

Economic Theories & Concepts

The policy goals and prescriptions in the *World Development Report 1980* incorporate both a neoclassical and an institutional economic perspective. The first section, emphasizing the benefits of a rapid growth economic model, calls on countries to improve their domestic efficiency by avoiding protectionism, participating in heavy structural adjustment, restructuring their trade patterns, restricting their spending/public expenditures, and increasing investments (1980). By encouraging trade liberalization and increasing capital flows, the World Bank assumed that the market would efficiently set prices and determine wages to reduce global income and development disparities. The IFIs prescription of trade liberalization and structural adjustment programs are two invading tools designed by the first world. Both these two prescriptions are designed without hearing the voices that are affected by the program. The immediate question that can be encountered is how the country ownership is declined when the country implements liberalization and structural adjustment program. For a program to be country owned in this case, the objective of the program is to be well addressed with the participation of those local voices that are going to be affected by the conditionality of the program. Complementing this strategy, however, are some institutional elements that emphasize sociological factors designed to contribute to rapid growth policies. This *Report* suggests that human development programs improve the fundamental quality of life in developing countries, by strengthening local institutions and developing human capital. In so doing, they indirectly support the economy and increase wealth. In conclusion, the report calls on development practitioners to tailor their programs to include both rapid economic growth policies (neoclassical) and human development initiatives (institutional). Yet this is strong depiction of declined country ownership in the World Development Report 1980.

The World Development Report 1990

The World Development Report 1990 promotes a message similar to that of the 1980 text. However, the message is now framed differently.

Instead of separating economic growth from poverty reduction, the 1990 Report integrates the two throughout. Contending that the "most pressing issue" facing the development community is how to reduce poverty, the mission and focus of World Bank policy is directed towards measuring poverty and drawing policy lessons from countries that have experienced poverty reduction (1990: iii). Again the Report advocates the policy lessons of those countries that have experience poverty reduction. But the local dynamics of society, politics, economy and culture could be different from the one for which the experiences and policies are going to be implemented. So the 'one size fits all' strategy dominantly excludes the country ownership in the programs. In addition, citing past development experience, the Report shows that, by incorporating poverty reduction approaches into development practices, growth strategies can more effectively sustain a higher quality of life.

The text offers a two-part strategy:

The first element of the strategy is the pursuit of a pattern of growth that ensures productive use of the poor's most abundant asset – labor. The second element is widespread provision to the poor of basic social services, especially primary education, primary health care, and family planning (1990: iii). According to the World Bank, these two elements are "mutually reinforcing; one without the other is not sufficient" (1990: 3). The first element uses international assistance to establish local employment opportunities and to invest in local entrepreneurship. The second increases the capacity of the poor to take advantage of these opportunities (1990: iii). In concluding its assessment of effective development policy, the 1990 *Report* challenges governments in both rich and poor countries alike to make it their goal to alleviate poverty by the 21st century (1990:1).

Language, Symbols, & Power

Abandoning the paternalistic language of the 1980 Report, the tone of the 1990 *World Development Report* is more neutral in arguing for poverty intervention. However, the *Report's* authors continue to make a strong case for policy intervention in developing areas. What is different is that the text emphasizes that the industrialized countries should focus on those countries that help themselves: "Where developing countries are committed to reducing poverty, the industrial countries should respond with increased assistance" (1990:6). This notion that developing countries are accountable for themselves repositions power relations where developing or low income countries are still to be considered dependent on developed countries for their strategies. No longer are developing countries seen to be completely helpless. At the same time, developed countries are reminded of their responsibility to help the less fortunate.

Again the rhetoric of the World Development Report 1990 creates a deep abyss between the developing countries and developed countries.

Economic Theories & Concepts

As in the 1980 *World Development Report*, the 1990 text recommends economic development strategies that are representative of both the institutional and neoclassical schools. The two frameworks are mutually supportive: without growth, there will be no poverty reduction, but without human capital, developing countries cannot take advantage of growth strategies. Thus, the *Report* calls for programs that develop human capital; provide access to knowledge/Education; and build institutions. At the same time, the *Report* argues that these programs must be cost-effective to be sustainable. According to the Bank, anti-poverty programs cannot substitute "for efforts to attune the broad stance of economic policy to the needs of the poor" (1990, 4). In this sense, the primary recommendation continues to be neoclassical policies, including macroeconomic adjustment, government intervention, trade liberalization, a shift in public spending in favor of the poor, and increased capital inflows (to cushion the impact of adjustment). The discussion of economic policies tailored to local needs is limited to the section regarding transfers and safety nets. Again IFI's strong advocacy for trade liberalization and structural adjustment program fails to assess the local needs and opportunities to be realized in order to facilitate better living standard and thus it becomes an exogenous imposition of development prescriptions.

Declined 'Country Ownership': Encumbered National Development Programs

The decline of 'country ownership' arguably creates the question of the space for national policy-making and development strategies, particularly in developing countries. Buiter (2004) argues, if this is the reality in a country that is a candidate for a program, it is beyond the ability of the IMF, World Bank, and other IFIs to remedy it (227). The effective choice for the IFIs is then between not having a program and having one that is not 'country owned' in the sense of not in the interest of and supported by the majority of the population. So, the question of national policy space contains at least two main aspects. First, national policy space is above all a political vision of national development and welfare that countries have to fight for including their local voices in the development programs. In this regard, the identification of national and local needs is the key to the formulation and implementation of appropriate national policies. Such process can be long and painful as it entails local social dialogue among divergent interests groups as well as a political balance of powers through legal frameworks that strike a balance between rights and obligations of citizens. It also must be an endogenous process, and can neither be dictated nor passed down internationally. One aspect is related to the impact of international rules on developing countries lacking appropriate regulatory frameworks.

The capacity of developing countries to regulate according to national needs might be limited as a result of too demanding international commitments. In concrete terms, this means that international disciplines and commitments shall not be construed to prevent countries from exercising the right to regulate, and to introduce new regulations, i.e., on the supply of services, including public services, in their territories to meet national policy objectives. Therefore, services provided by central, regional and local governments and authorities (Article I:3 (a) (i) of the GATS) shall continue to be excluded from trade negotiations as they remain as central means to maintain social cohesion and redistribution. The international macro-economic global framework and conditionality, however, continue to weaken the capabilities of developing countries to regulate internally. One could wonder indeed how developing countries, in particular in Africa, exercise their policy space, in situations where almost half of them do not have an independent monetary policy, have entered into structural adjustment program with the World Bank, and are facing the black hole of debt constraints.

Secondly, at the national level, international decisions and structures have limited governments' capacity to improve both legislation and implementation of more need based development strategies or programs which could open the new horizon of opportunities for the country.

Case Study: Bangladesh

Bangladesh, a country of diminished by poverty since its emergence in 1971 has been continuously seeking its way to attain economic growth and development. Therefore, the development paradigm of Bangladesh has always been significantly influenced by the IFIs. Theoretical analysis of the development paradigm of Bangladesh indicates the shifts of paradigm which are manifold in nature which positions the fact that with the development discourse being affected by exogenous IFIs, the 'country ownership' has been declined. Rahman and Eusuf (2004) argue, after independence, Bangladesh followed a policy of very rigid import substitution in its industrialization strategy. The emphasis on rigid import substitution as the development strategy clearly conceives or patronizes the expansion of domestic industry which positions local voices in the development strategy.

After the emergence of structural adjustment policies, Bangladesh was one of the countries to resort to the structural adjustment facility set by IMF in 1986. Bangladesh embraced also Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility by the same year. In all these strategies the notion of 'country ownership' was completely disengaged and declined. Rahman and Eusuf

(2004) observes, due to structural adjustment program which advocated trade liberalization, Bangladesh faced a reduction of mean nominal protection for all tradable goods in the economy from 89 percent in 1989 to about 28 percent in 1999 which set the domestic industry off the competitive market leaving a large number of laborers unemployed (p:21). So the absence of labour intensiveness in the development strategy clearly justifies the argument that while devising strategy under the structural adjustment program, local dynamics and voices were not considered. Peterse (1998) maintains, it is not widely accepted that development efforts are more successful when there is participation from community (p:344).

Again, desubsidization in agricultural sector under the structural adjustment program led subsistence farmers to more fragile economic condition. This ineffective strategy indicates the local exclusion in the development strategy.

As a response to the failure of SAP, in 1990, World Bank and IMF launched Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) for developing countries like Bangladesh. Again the inclusion of local voice in the development of PRSP has been an issue of long debate. Buiter (2004) maintains, despite the large number of NGOs and civil society groups, organizations, and factions involved in some of the PRSP consultative processes, the representativeness of the constitutions remains an open issue (p: 227). So the under-representation of the enterprise sector, and especially the private enterprise sector, in most PRSP consultative processes represents a serious dent in its claim to be representative of all the parties whose efforts are essential to a successful attack on poverty or who are affected by it. Thus, the international development strategies or programs for Bangladesh have declined the very notion of ‘country ownership’.

Conclusion

Over the years international development discourse has evolved a great deal to deal with the new issues. Comprehensive human development through local participation on the basis of country ownership has been the present notion of development discourse. Although the notion of ‘country ownership’ in development discourse is variegated and multidimensional and needs to be deconstructed in terms of variegated local social reality of development as mentioned by Escobar, development discourse should be mainstreamed and designed with the voices of those for which the programs are going to be designed and who are going to be affected by these.

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