

# Clarifying confusion between development as 'change' and 'intention'

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*Abstract:- How does development happen? Confusion can arise between the idea of development as an outcome of economic, political and social progress, as against development as the result of deliberate interventions intended to bring change about. Cowen and Shenton (1996) made a useful distinction between 'intentional' and 'immanent' development, locating its origins within European industrialization and colonialism. In a similar vein, Hart (2001) identified 'big D' Development as the post-1945 Western project of modernisation in the Global South, and 'little d' development as the unfolding, uneven and contradictory process of capitalist change. We argue that such distinctions not only serve to clarify different ways of thinking about development, but also provides a useful historical perspective. The entry explores the relationship between the two ways of thinking about development using the example of the garment sector in Bangladesh, and identifies some strengths, weaknesses and ambiguities. It concludes with some grounded speculation about whether such distinctions remain relevant in today's changing development landscapes.*

## Introduction

The term 'development' can be used in several different ways: to describe broad processes of economic and social transformation, to refer to 'levels' of progress in terms of economic, political and social conditions found in different countries or regions, and as a descriptor for the broad field of activity undertaken by actors in the international aid system. Development is therefore a word that is made to work extremely hard. Two particular areas of difficulty can arise from confusion between the use of development to refer to societal change and its consequences, and its use to describe the intentions and activities of institutional actors designed to bring it about.

Currie-Alder et al.'s (2014) simple definition is that development refers to 'how societies change over time', but this raises important questions about how and why they may change. For Heinz Arndt (1981) the two main meanings boil down to development as *something that is done* (involving intention and choice) and development as *something that happens* (an outcome based on some kind of ex ante logic). How can we make sense of these two distinct meanings, and can they be fitted together?

## Exploring unfolding change versus intention

Making this distinction can clarify and add precision to discussions of development. Two main approaches to this issue have become influential. The first is the distinction between 'intentional' and 'immanent' development coined by historians Michael Cowen and Bob

Shenton (1996). They distinguished two main ways of thinking about how societies change: (i) faith in the unfolding progress through which societies advance and bring improvements to people's lives, and (ii) the reformist idea of state action that can minimise the undesirable consequences of capitalism and bring order to disruptive processes of economic change. They argue that the modern idea of development principally arose from the state's need to manage instability within Europe's rapidly industrialising societies: 'it was in Europe that development was first meant to create order out of the social disorder of rapid urbanization, poverty and unemployment'. From these origins, they suggest, the idea of development became associated with Europe's expansion, and extended from the domestic realm into the colonies. Colonial powers came to see themselves as sufficiently 'developed' such that 'they could act to determine the process of development for others deemed 'less-developed''. This was achieved through a paternalistic notion of 'trusteeship', based on the idea that it was the state's job to manage problems of poverty, urban migration and unemployment, both at home and, increasingly, in colonial territories. This produced a historically specific 'doctrine of development' that linked the growth and expansion of capitalism with the need to control and manage change.

Geographer Gillian Hart (2001) discusses a similar distinction in her work. Hart identifies the post-1945 international aid system, the international financial institutions, the United Nations and non-governmental organizations as a specific historical formation that she calls 'big D Development'. This is contrasted with 'small d development', the unfolding process of capitalist growth and expansion, which produces developmental change, but with uneven outcomes and both winners and losers. This draws on Cowen and Shenton's ideas but adds a number of additional points. The first is the idea that a dialectical relationship exists between these two kinds of development. Indeed, the 'big D' system serves the interests of 'little d' in important ways – both by providing welfare safety nets for those who lose from capitalist change, in order to maintain order and stability, and by enabling the progress and expansion of capitalism through promoting policies such as economic liberalisation.

Hart's conceptualization also opens up the possibility of agency and resistance. A link is made with Karl Polanyi's influential book *The Great Transformation* (1944), which traces the development of a highly commodified market society and pushback from society against this process, which he terms the 'double movement'. Polanyi understood efforts to check the market's expansion dialectically, as arising from potentially productive 'countertendencies' that are contained within capitalism, based on 'the clash of the organising principles of economic liberalism and social protection'. Trade unions, civil society organisations and social movements seek to reshape capitalism. Contestation emerges around the struggle for social protection, such as improved labour standards, equal rights and social justice within harsh processes of industrialisation and modernisation.

Both of these frameworks for thinking about development emerged during the 1990s post-Cold War period, when structural adjustment policies imposed on the Global South were now being accompanied by triumphalist proclamations about globalization, 'the end of history' and the natural dominance of liberal capitalism. Hart in particular wished to challenge those she called 'neoliberal globalists' by reasserting the importance of the developmental state. She proposed that this could be achieved not by focusing not on the ameliorative terrain of 'big D', but instead by engaging with 'small d' issues of class and

power, and as a more profound way to engage with increasing levels of inequality, exclusion and injustice.

### **How are these distinctions useful?**

Distinguishing development as unfolding change from deliberate intervention can be useful in both analytical and practical ways. First, as we have seen, it provides more background and depth to discussion of development, which is a field that is sometimes criticised for its ahistoricism. The principle of trusteeship for example has echoes in the assumptions and practices found in many development agencies working in the Global South today. There is a paternalist element in the discourses of 'capacity building' and 'women's empowerment' that reflects roots in the idea of trusteeship.

Hart (2010) also shows that the complex relationship between 'big D' and 'little d' is not static, but dynamic. For example, during the first few decades after World War Two, the state was seen as central to the process of modernization and capitalist change, while the 1980s ushered in a neoliberal ideology in which market liberalization and state withdrawal were put centre stage.

Second, the distinction can speak to debates about the sometimes problematic relationship between development theory and practice. For example, Thomas (2000) has argued that development should not be defined narrowly as 'what development agencies do', nor that 'the development of capitalism accords to some kind of natural historical law'. Hart's work for example argues that 'the conditions for global capitalism have constantly to be promoted by those political forces which favour them'. Framing this relationship helps us to overcome the regular periods of 'impasse' in development studies (e.g. Booth 1993) when scholars and practitioners find themselves unable to communicate effectively with each other.

Third, the distinction challenges an increasing emphasis on purely technical approaches to development by insisting on the need to bring in politics. A focus only on 'big D' produces a depoliticised conception of development intervention that focuses on managing institutional capacity building, service delivery, infrastructure and public administration reform. Such reformist interventions do not address underlying processes of capitalist (or indeed socialist) development, paying insufficient attention to alternative ways of organising political, economic and social relationships.

For example, one useful example of the way the distinction has been deployed usefully in theory/practice discussions is in relation to the role of non-governmental development organizations (NGOs). For example, Bebbington et al. (2005) use the 'little d/big D' distinction in their discussion of the different roles taken by NGOs in development, comparing service delivery work with advocacy and rights based approaches. While NGOs delivering services within project or contract settings can have positive implications for citizens, especially in the short term, they argue that NGOs that move beyond the 'big D' realm to engage with 'little d' development through lobbying to change the structural

causes of poverty and mobilising against injustice may achieve more transformative effects in the longer term.

The example of Bangladesh's garment based export-driven development model can be used to briefly explore the strengths and weaknesses of the distinction. Since the 1970s, the country has manufactured and exported ready-made garments. This process of industrialization has become the backbone of the economy and made a major contribution to the country's recent graduation to lower middle income country status. The garment factories have created employment for women, generated rural to urban migration, and led to social change (Lewis 2011). Lives have been transformed, even empowered. But poor working conditions, regular industrial accidents and labour unrest also illustrate both the transformative and disruptive power of raw capitalism as a driver of change – as described by the 'little d' formulation set out by Hart, and is reminiscent of the dislocation described by Cowen and Shenton's account of nineteenth century Europe.

At the same, the agencies of 'big D' development seek points of contact with the garment industry, with donors supporting initiatives to improve accountability in international supply chains, and NGOs both providing services to workers and factories such as childcare facilities and campaigning to improve workers' rights. In this way 'big D' can be seen to serve 'little d' development through its ameliorative role in welfare service provision, but it may also challenge it by engaging in efforts to open up new spaces for transformation – in line with Polanyi's 'double movement' idea.

The example also illustrates the problem of making a clear separation between the two ideas of development at the level of social process and policy. At the international level, international trade and investment governance arrangements in the multi-fibre agreement (MFA) made it possible through a quota system for capital to flow to Bangladesh during the 1980s in the early stages of the ready-made garment industry. At the national level, the developmental state has also played a key role in providing and managing the policy and regulatory framework that has made the expansion of the country's garment industry. How does this state action fit within our distinction? Where does 'small d' end and 'big D' begin?

Here Jonathan Rigg's (2004) modification of the D/d distinction from the perspective of south east Asia is helpful. In addition to the ideas of 'big D' as managed change ('funds, technologies and expert advice, much of it from the rich world'), and 'little d' (as the 'historical progress of capitalism'), he proposes two further categories. These are additions to the 'big D' category, in the form of 'superscript development' ( $D^d$ ) and 'subscript development' ( $D_d$ ). The first draws attention to the role of developmental states that direct development processes, and the second concerns the role of NGOs, movements and community groups that seek to promote 'alternative' forms of development. He writes that '[t]he point of drawing out development typologies in this way is that it helps to contextualize – intellectually – different critiques of development'. It also allows us to better distinguish the entanglements of state, market and civil society. For example, in the case of the Bangladesh garment sector discussed above, it illustrates the ways that understanding 'big D' also requires us to engage with the role of the developmental state in formulating policies to attract and manage investment in export garment sector, and with the diverse range of civil society responses to this industrial policy.

## Conclusion

Distinguishing development's two main meanings, as unfolding change and as purposeful intervention, can be useful in three main ways. First, it helps to clarify the different ways in which the word development is used, and, hopefully to sharpen debate. Second, it historicises ideas about development in ways that challenge technical and apolitical assumptions that have become common in development policy and practice today. Cowen and Shenton's work usefully highlights the longer term origins of development ideas – such as early twentieth century British colonial welfare policies – long before the post WW2 moment that many associate with the birth of modern development ideas. Hart's analysis identifies the post-1945 creation of a Western international development system as a distinct historical moment in the twentieth century and makes it possible to examine the relationship between this system and the wider capitalist system. Thirdly, it is useful in discussions of development policy and practice, where it can inform debates about reformism and welfare versus structural change, and whether and how sites of resistance can usefully be opened up by activists. But some may also feel that there are unresolved contradictions in the distinction as well, around the role of policy actors beyond the aid system (such as non-funded activist organisations and movements) and the precise nature of the dialectic relationship between change and intention. Rigg's revised formulation begins to usefully to address some of this.

What of the future? Following the post-war period first of state-led modernisation and later of market-based neoliberalism, what happens to 'big D' within the rise of new forms of financialized and business-centred ideas of development? As the aid system has become more closely aligned with finance, Western bilateral aid has declined, and there are new Southern actors reshaping the landscapes of development. Does the distinction continue to offer insights into understanding contemporary worlds of development, or does it become less useful as the Western post-1945 order is challenged by new realities?

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