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A Review of Modern Development

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Modern development is embedded in the Enlightenment. An emphasis on science and rationality formed the basis for metanarratives that would allow civilization to flow from barbarism to civilization. Modern development used Darwinian evolution to argue that underdeveloped nations can “evolve” into more developed nations through progress led by capitalism and technology. Capitalism’s Industrial Revolution’s generated surplus value fueled the basis for progress. Christianity was a demarcation for civilizing the rest of the world and developed into 19th century humanism. Hence, the manifestations of trusteeships became the applied hegemony of the Western view over the rest of the world (Potter et al, p. 9-10).

The official start of the modern era of development begins with President Truman’s 1949 speech that declared global poverty a threat to all nations since it could lead to communism. The First World hoped to replicate its developmental experience in the Third World with aid mechanisms and planning systems, synonymizing development with economic growth (Potter et al. p. 10). In order to track modern development, measurements like the GDP favored quantitative change over qualitative change for development (Potter et al, p. 27).

This growth strategy of modern development has been critiqued, like how its top-down approach overly privileges one-dimensional economic solutions that erode the state and promote inequality and underdevelopment (Potter et al, pp. 21-24; 27-28). The unequal effects of modern development are demarcated by the Brandt Line, separating developed Northern countries, like Australia, from underdeveloped Southern countries, like Thailand (Potter et al, p. 42). Such inequalities have led to new South-South development, like amongst BRICS countries, where a development state leads change in a country (Potter et al, pp. 36-37). In response, alternative development has arisen, which emphasizes community participation, NGO facilitation, and subaltern contributions to development (Potter et al, pp. 24-25).

Overall, classical development has been detrimental to the world’s population. Modern development has decreased absolute poverty, or how many people live off less than \$1.25 a day (Potter et al. pp. 30). However, relative inequality has grown to the point where the world’s wealthiest quintile held 83% of global income while the lowest quintile only held 2% (Potter et al, p. 22). Overall, HDI scores show some gains concerning poverty and education.

Relative inequality leads to significant harm to poor populations, particularly ruralities, since development often holds an urban bias in regards to infrastructural growth, education, healthcare, and other services (Potter et al, pp. 38-39). Also, women and children tend to be the most neglected by modern development, like poor prenatal healthcare and education, so its effects underdevelop vulnerable populations (Potter et al, p. 29). Alternative development, in contrast, attempts to reverse this trend by starting from below

(Potter et al, p. 48). Also, wealth disparities exist not only within nations, but also in respect to the Global North continually becoming wealthier than the Global South, as per HDI scores that show that half of the world's wealth is concentrated in 1% of the global population (Potter et al, p. 46).

Lastly, development has been globally detrimental in terms of its impact on the environment. The UN recognized how the MDGs were not challenging the privileged position of the Global North over the Global South, so they were replaced by the SDGs to better allocate resources to poor countries and to better combat climate change (Potter et al, p. 34). However, the financial unfeasibility of the SDGs coupled with the fact that they do not address environmental cataclysms like rising sea-levels in the Pacific or food shortages in Africa (Potter et al, p. 36). Modern development tries to fix economies without considering the environmental hardships that the Global South or future generations will face.

References

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