

# Transforming 'Development'

## *An Arena for Macro Social Work*

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The recent typhoons that entered the Philippines during the last quarter of 2004 and the devastation that followed put the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), as usual, in the forefront of the relief efforts. These relief efforts were followed by the massive rehabilitation work which the DSWD and other welfare and social development agencies were involved.

At the hindsight, one may wonder whether decision-makers in the government considered the social and ecological impact of their decision to award thousands of forest covers to big time logging concessionaires. Was the Department of Social Welfare and Development or other social development practitioners ever consulted when the government opted to fully embrace the liberalized market that has adverse impact on the welfare of those on the bottom of the economic ladder? Are social workers only seen to be necessary for damage control and crisis intervention or in charge of "tidying-up after the market?" (Pieterse, 1997)

The picture of social development workers particularly social workers doing crisis intervention or doing damage control while the government is vigorously pursuing economic policies which have adversely affected the indigenous people, the laborers, the subsistence and the landless farmers, women and children is just an indication of the place of social development in the development discourse, that is, in the margins.

Next to 'love,' 'development' is probably the word that is often over-used, misused and abused. Like 'love,' 'development' has become a discourse. This led some writers who are opposed to the dominant discourse to repudiate the use of the term itself. (Escobar, 1995; Illich, 1997; Sachs, 1997) As a discourse, 'development' has gone beyond its dictionary definition and

through the years has assumed different premises underlying the many definitions given to it. This means that when one sees or hears the word 'development' being used today the reader or the hearer can never presume to understand the premises without knowing and understanding the discursive field of the user. Simply put, "development" means different things to different people depending on the discursive field where one is operating.

This paper does not propose to reject the term 'development' *per se* but seeks to transform the dominant discourse that prevails in the development landscape. Corollary to this, the underlying premises of the dominant players in the development field will be unmasked to reveal the marginalization of social development in the discursive field. After showing how the hegemonic force and its team of experts systematically determined and produced 'development' as it is today, this paper advances the significant role of social workers in transforming the mainstream discourse on "development."

### **Development: A Discursive Field**

Discourse was derived from the word "discursus" which is a past participle of the Latin word "discurrere" which means the act of running about. (Webster, 1967) The meaning evolved to mean the power of the mind to reason or infer by running, as it were, from one fact or reason to another and deriving a conclusion. It can also mean the range of reasoning faculty. Discourse is like an amoeba, fluid-like but it moves within certain domain. Discourse should be seen not just as a combination of different concepts nor an introduction of new ideas, nor a conglomeration of practices or strategies, nor the influence of institutions but the product of a set of relations among all these to form a conceptual domain. As a conceptual domain, rules are set on whose voices are heard and the types of thoughts and ideas that can be said. (Escobar, 1995) This paper views development as a conceptual terrain, a cast of mind pursued and institutionalized by dominant forces which seeks to establish their hegemony in the world.

Development as discourse has been expounded by Escobar in "Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World." (Escobar, 1995) Escobar explained that one can understand development as discourse if one examines the system of *relations established between institutions, socio-economic processes, forms of knowledge, technological factors and so on, define the conditions under which objects, concepts,*

*theories, and strategies can be incorporated into the discourse. In sum, the system of relations establishes a discursive practice that sets the rules of the game: who can speak, from what points of view, with what authority, and according to what criteria of expertise; it sets the rules that must be followed for this or that problem, theory, or object to emerge and be named, analyzed, and eventually transformed into a policy or a plan.* (Escobar, 1995) In a discourse the ideas of the dominant and those who have power over the others are the ones being pursued even if the language used may mimic those of the oppressed or those espousing alternative ideas.

Martinussen (1997) outlined the different dimensions and conceptions of development: a) economic growth; b) modernization; c) increased welfare and human development; d) elimination of dependency; e) dialectical transformation; f) capacity building and development by the people; g) sustainable development; h) development as security; and i) development as history.

Development as economic growth and as modernization. In the 50's there was no agreement among economists on the exact meaning of growth then but they all consider economic growth as the goal. When the development economics came into prominence, economic development was defined as "a process whereby the real per capita income of a country increases over a long period of time while simultaneously poverty is reduced and the inequality in society is generally diminished." (Meier, 1989 as quoted by Martinussen, 1997) The focus on growth renders the reduction of poverty as just coating of a bitter pill. In practice the obsession on growth which is accompanied by the accumulation of capital has not reduced poverty. Related to development as economic growth is development as modernization. Development according to this conception is a "process whereby the traditional and backward Third World countries developed towards greater similarity with the Western or rather the North-Western world." (Pye, 1966, Apter, 1965 in Martinussen) This means imitating the western world especially in its consumption patterns and taste. Third world people were lured into accumulating appliances and other gadgets which are considered marked of a modernized people. Growth and modernization however, deepened the poverty divide. In the pursuit of this, the rich in the Third World countries became richer while the poor, poorer. This occurrence lead Ivan Illich to declare that development is planned poverty.

Development as increased welfare and human development. This conception of development was pursued by economists such as Amartya Sen, Paul Streeten, Mahbub ul Haq and other development economists who considered that economic growth should not be the end but the means to attain human welfare and development. Mahbub ul Haq defined development in his human development framework as the enlargement of people's choices. The human development framework sounds people centered but the fact is, by following the neo-liberal frame, it relegated the welfare issue to the fringes of the market. UI haq revealed its adherence to neo-liberal frame when he embraced structural adjustment as complementary to human development. Viewing development as the enhancement of human capital is a revelation of its adherence to the tenets of the unregulated market. (Pieterse, 1997)

Development as the elimination of dependency. Noting that under-development is caused by the developing countries' relationship with the North-Western countries, theorists adept in Marx' analysis of capitalism espouse that developing countries break ties with the developed countries. Gunder Frank termed this process as 'delinking'. (Frank, 1967) These group of theorists define development as "gaining of real national independence and self-centered economic progress." (Martinussen)

Development as dialectical transformation. This perspective rise from the field of anthropology, sociology and political science. It does not reject traditions and at the same time welcomes modernization. This conception considers development as a social phenomenon where the traditional and the modern are in a process of interaction resulting to a new phenomenon which is a combination of both.

Development as capacity building and development by the people. This is a paradigm shift from the early growth and modernization theories. This conception of development bloomed directly from all fields across the developing countries. This is also called the alternative development perspective. True to its form, nobody claimed as the author of this framework. There are however people who have articulated this perspective like Paulo Freire but neither he, can claim as the originator of this idea. Many social workers in developing countries have contributed to the flourishing of this perspective but

this alternative discourse has yet to claim its place in the mainstream of the development discourse.

Sustainable development is "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987:3) This conception was meant to balance the massive exploitation of the environment in the name of economic growth and its impact on the welfare of the people.

Development as security is a response to the lopsided priorities of governments in putting a big chunk of national budgets to building armaments instead of economic and social development endeavors. In 1994, The Human Development Report proposed that 'human security' should be given utmost attention and not just the security of nation-states. The recognition of human security as an important dimension of development also coincided with the official recognition of the importance of human rights to development.

Development as history is a reaction to the dominant discourse of development. Proponents of this conception argue that the development should be defined by communities either local or national and not by outside forces specifically north-westerners.

The dimensions and conceptions mentioned by Martinussen emerged from different discursive fields but in the course of time have been co-opted by the dominant discourse. Taking cue from Escobar (1995), this paper argues that development is not just a combination of some or all of these dimensions and conceptions but also the arrangement of the dimensions and conceptions within a certain framework and the processes wherein the dominant forces institutionalized their framework.

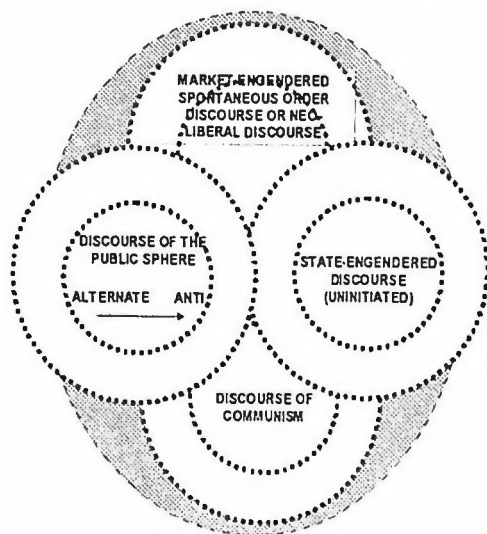
Three discourses of development were identified by Grillo. (1997) A fourth discourse is added in this paper at the risk of being contentious. The fourth one may not be strictly considered as belonging to the discursive field of 'development' but has been penetrated lately by 'development experts.' Please refer to Diagram 1 for the illustration on the overlapping fields of discourse. According to Grillo, the following are the discursive fields of development that have emerged through the years:

a) Discourse of 'state engendered order' which took its form within the confines of the United Nations and have been espoused by multilateral and bilateral aid organizations. This discourse took off after the World War II. Sach (1992) traced the beginning of this discourse on January 20, 1949 when Harry Truman in his inauguration speech declared the Southern Hemisphere as 'underdeveloped areas' which needed interventions from the North in order to develop. This discourse has been considered as "elaborated, authoritative, interventionist ideology."

b) Discourse of the 'market-engendered spontaneous order.' The common name for this discourse is the neo-liberal discourse. For decades, national governments have been primarily responsible for national economic policies, but in the late 1970's international financial institutions began to encroach on the formulation of economic policies of national governments through the imposition of structural adjustment as a condition for loans and aids. Espoused by hegemonic forces, this discourse has dominated the development landscape and mindscape.

c) Discourse of the public sphere. This discourse has emerged from the activism of the people who are critical of the other emerging development discourses. The discourse of the public sphere can range from conceptualizing alternatives development to repudiating the very idea of 'development'.

d) Discourse of Communism has been added as a reminder that 'development' as a concept has been popularized to counter the emergence of communism. Sachs, (1992) expounded on this. In his Introduction to the "The Development Dictionary," he explained that, "Truman launched the idea of development in order to provide a comforting vision of a world order where US would naturally rank first. The rising influence of the Soviet Union, the first country which had industrialized outside capitalism, forced him to come up with a vision that would engage the loyalty of the decolonizing countries in order to sustain his struggle against communism. For over 40 years, development has been a weapon in the competition between political systems." In the recent years, however, the discourses of development has encroached the discursive field of communism.



**Diagram 1. Discourses on Development**

### **Marginalization of Social Development in the Development Discourse**

Is social development marginalized in the development discourse? Economic gurus immersed in freeing the market surmised that it is not so. Social development has been incorporated in development programs and policies, they say.

To understand how social development is being marginalized demands an understanding of development as discourse. For almost four decades already the dominant discourse in development has been the 'market-engendered order' discourse. In its attempt to be accepted, this discourse has co-opted the terms used by the discourse of the public sphere: 'sustainable development,' 'social development,' 'poverty reduction,' etc. The nature of the 'market-engendered order' discourse requires 'efficiency.' Efficiency in economics means the allocation of goods and services but which has the underlying premise that in the course of allocation, some persons are made

better off at the expense of others. With efficiency as an important element of the dominant discourse the social dimension is just a token or a 'safety net' for the adverse impact of development framed in the 'market-engendered order.'

Documents of global economic institutions ensured that social development is being taken into consideration. The World Bank has even developed its Poverty Reduction Strategy Sourcebook. A closer look at the Poverty Reduction Program of the World Bank which apparently seemed to consider the social welfare of the poor showed that it was formulated in order to effectively pursue the economic agenda of the bank that requires countries with loans to cut down government spending. Experience shows that when government cuts down its budget, the first to suffer are the social development programs.

The World Summit on Social Development has been mentioned as the proof that social development has gained importance in the development discourse. The Summit's declaration explicitly states that "social development and social justice are indispensable for the achievement and maintenance of peace and security within and among our nations. In turn, social development and social justice cannot be attained in the absence of peace and security or in the absence of respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms." This particular statement has to be read closely and analyzed carefully. The phrase 'peace and security' became a camouflage for the protection of the 'market-engendered order.' A closer look at the statement raised several questions: "Who defines 'peace and security?'" "Whose security is being talked about?" "Whose Peace?" "Who defines the meaning of 'weapons of mass destruction?'" "Who defines the 'enemy?'" "Social justice for whom?" Answering these questions will show how the dominant found its way to make a landmark declaration a document of contradictions.

Closer to home, the recent decision of the Philippine Supreme Court that foreign firms can now resume exploiting our natural resources through mining unmasked the dominance of economic discourse in the development landscape of the Philippines. This illustrates how the unregulated market paradigm captures the mind not only of the capitalists and neo-liberal planners and policymakers but also the august chamber of the highest dispenser of justice in the land. This shows how the lure of economic growth can blind even the supposedly guardians of equality and social justice.



The Medium-Term Philippine Development Plan 2004-2005, the official development blueprint of the Philippine government is a concrete testimony to the neo-liberal bias of the state's development managers. Neo-liberalism, simply put is the unwavering belief in the power of the unregulated market to trigger economic growth. It brings about the fundamentalist assumption that economic growth will automatically put an end to poverty and other social problems related to it. What is not revealed and never discussed is the implicit premise that inequality is necessary for economic growth. The introduction to the Plan articulated this neo-liberal framework: *The basic task of the Medium-Term Philippine Development Plan (MTPDP), 2004-2010 is to fight poverty by building prosperity for the greatest number of the Filipino people. The country must open up economic opportunities, maintain socio political stability, and promote good stewardship - all to ensure better quality of life of its citizens. The country will focus on strategic measures and activities, which will spur economic growth and create jobs. This can only be done with a common purpose to put the economic house back in working order.* (MTPDP, 2004-2005) The dominant discourse has penetrated even the chambers of the national legislatures with their classification of issues as hard or soft issues. Hard issues are economic issues while soft issues are issues other than economics which include social issues.

Development seemed to be weaned from the dominance of the market as illustrated in the Declaration on the Right to Development. The declaration states that development "is a comprehensive economic, social, cultural and political process, which aims at the constant improvement of the well-being of the entire population and of all individuals on the basis of their active, free and meaningful participation in development and in the fair distribution of benefits resulting therefrom." (adopted by the United Nations General Assembly resolution 41/128, December 4, 1986) The definition in the declaration spells out the comprehensiveness of the term development. It also showed that all spheres of development are co-equal: economic, social, cultural and political. It puts the human person as the central subject, active participant and ultimate beneficiary of development; but while countries are signing the most signed human rights declaration, the World Bank and the IMF are vigorously pursuing structural adjustment strategies which prevent states to pursue comprehensive development. Where, then, is development in the overall framework?

Framed within the neo-liberal discourse, economic growth has been the primary dimensions being considered by development planners who are

primarily from the field of neo-liberal economics. In this framework, all other dimensions are subsidiary to the main dimension. Please refer to Diagram 2 to visualize the formation of the dominant discourse.

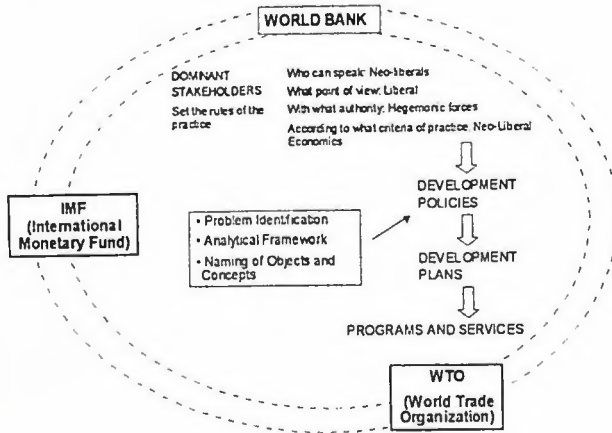


Diagram 2. The Making of a Dominant Discourse

### Putting the 'Social' in the Heart of 'Development': An Imperative for Macro Social Work

The clamor for change came from all quarters of society. Change agents have been emerging from different fields and from all sectors of society. There is however one profession that claims change agent practice as its own, and that profession, is the social work profession (Brueggemann, 2002). Social workers pursue structural and system change in the realm of the bigger society, hence emerges the term macro social work. Macro social work is *the social work arena committed to making a society that is finally free of social problems, the resolution of which eluded humanity since the dawn of civilization. It is a profession that calls you to think about how your social intelligence, your social ideals, and your social leadership can be brought to bear in constructing a truly humane society. It is the hope and dream of macro social work that a world free of oppression,*

*poverty, and injustice can and will exist.* (Ibid,2002) Several social workers have been engaging the macro sphere through the years but only recently has the practice been given impetus.

Development has been dominated by economists specifically neo-liberal economists for a long time. This paper called on social workers not to let the proponents of the unregulated market marginalize social development by turning it into just a "safety net" that catches the casualties crushed by the engine of the runaway market. Presently, development is primarily controlled by the proponents of unbridled market and capital accumulation. Proponents of these ideas have even used the terms used by the social development workers to hide the real premises of their framework.

The dominance of the unregulated market ideology has not only marginalized social development but even influenced the practice of the social work profession. As Brueggemann pointed out, *Modern social work has allowed itself to adopt economic methods that exclude not only the social, but the values, meaning, and emotions, without which social work is crippled, impotent, and blind.* He recommends that *Social workers in general and macro social workers in particular, therefore, must be very careful about uncritically accepting rational economic models and, instead, develop those that emancipate people from the economic society in which they are captive.*

Social workers are first and foremost workers as the name suggests. Does this assumption which has been ingrained in the social workers predisposes them to a certain kind of "logophobia" as Foucault termed it i.e. a fear of the spoken word? Social workers will disagree. Social workers are great speakers, trainers, community organizers, and even advocates, why accused them of having "logophobia?" Logophobia in this paper refers to the tendency to refrain from participating in the discourse and leaving the discursive field to the dominant players. Logophobia may be caused not by fear but perhaps by the opinion that engaging in discourse is not a mandate of the profession. As a profession however who claim change agent practice as its own, it is about time the social workers should engage the proponents of the market oriented development and put social development in the heart of development and not just as a profession relegated to the rehabilitation of those marginalized by the unbridled market.

Commitment to change the macro sphere should be a conscious effort for the social workers. No profession has permeated the different levels of

people's lives as the social work profession. The effort to be part of the discourse can be assumed by the social workers from the site of practice wherever one finds oneself in e.g., medical social workers in public hospitals can advocate for additional budget to subsidize needy patients and join the call for the repudiation of onerous debts, the payments of which take the bulk of the national budget. Social workers in the field should do research on the impact of the economic liberalization policies of the government to subsistence farmers, indigenous people, women and children. In the course of implementing social welfare programs, projects, and services, the social worker should not forget to raise her/his gaze beyond programs, projects and services in order to examine the over-all development blueprint and how it impacts on the over-all welfare of the people.

The conscious effort to change the dominant discourse in the communicative arena is also called engaging the social thinking process. (Brueggemann, 2002) Note that the phrase is 'engaging the social thinking process' and not 'engaging in the social thinking process'. The latter is something social workers always do. The use of the former phrase though, aims to bring into the consciousness the fact that there is a prevailing social thinking process that seeks to influence the different spheres of people's lives. Social workers are called to engage the social thinking process which has been dominated by the market paradigm. They should draw those who are excluded in the discursive sphere to be part of the engagement in order to effect changes in the social environment.

Social workers have been very active in the micro and mezzo sphere but very few are involved in the macro sphere. Since the dominant discourse has the grip on the global sphere, the challenge is for social workers to be prepared to bring their agenda of putting the 'social' in the heart of 'development' at the macro sphere.

How can social workers be prepared to engage the prevailing social thinking in the field of development? By knowing the language of the powerful and the powerbrokers. One example is for the social workers to study the language of macroeconomics in order to be able to unmask the underlying agenda and prevent the debilitating impact of macroeconomic policies.

In what way can social workers engage social thinking at the macro sphere? Taking the cue from Brueggemann, the macro social worker can be a social policy advocate and become active in the social move-

ment. Social workers actually have gained the expertise to be advocates for social policies. In a situation however, where social policies abound but social development is far from being achieved, perhaps it is a must not only to advocate for social policies but to be part of the formulation of economic policies. The social worker should exert effort to be recognized as the key player in macro-development planning which has been dominated by economists, specifically neo-liberal economists. This may sound like a losing proposition because the reality is that the participation of social workers and other social development workers in the development planning body of the country (Philippines) is just a token. The voice of the social worker is drowned by the trumpets of the economic think tank. This is illustrated in the formulation of the Medium Term Philippine Development Plan. Even if the Plan mentioned social justice and poverty alleviation, the fact is that the direction of development in the MTPDP is towards freeing the market. However, social workers should not be frustrated. They should continue to engage the architects of the state outside the formal arena. They should not be contented in implementing stop gap measures and social safety nets programs but should critically assess the overall development blueprint of the government. This requires that a social worker should have a 'third eye' or the capacity to examine government policies particularly macro policies beyond the written word.

Another significant course of action is to become active in the global social movements that seek for a more humane world. In solidarity with different peoples seeking for alternatives to the unbridled market paradigm, the social workers' voices will have gained the force that will hopefully dislodge the dominant paradigm in the landscape of development.

Putting social development as the focal point and not just a rhetoric or a 'safety net' seemed easy but can be a formidable challenge for social workers. This means not simply advocating for social welfare policies nor even ensuring that policies considered as 'safety nets' by economic planners are in place. This requires that social workers should seek to transform the economic paradigm which shapes the development landscape; the paradigm which consider the social as 'soft' issue and not an integral part of the whole development mindscape. The social workers' voices in unison with the voices of the marginalized, the exploited, the excluded and of those working and seeking for alternative development will hopefully drown the trumpets of the powerful, the dominant and the exploitative.

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