



# CHANGING THE STORY

## Imagining Power: Development, Participation and Creativity

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## **Chapter One**

### **Imagining Power: Development, Participation and Creativity**

**Martin Keat**

Participation and creativity are essential to contemporary international development. The global development sector tends to be dominated by established economic mechanisms, structures and ideologies. Human and social development are often considered as inevitable outcomes of these economic processes. Despite development progress over recent years, there remain significant challenges to be addressed in relation to those targets that the sector sets itself. In this chapter I consider the history of development as well as its contemporary structure and challenges, this focus arising from my experience over the last three decades of working in the sector. I will also locate participation within contemporary practice, and provide my own perspective on why creativity is so vital and how the sector can improve outcomes with increased engagement and participation.

#### **What is Development?**

While development must always be understood in response to specific sets of circumstances and contexts, in general terms it is helpful to consider two broad definitions. On the one hand, people tend to define development as a process of inevitable historical change. On the other, it is frequently viewed as the consequence of deliberate efforts to achieve progress. The former implies that development progresses within society as a natural consequence of existing democratic, economic and power structures. The latter suggests that, for transformative progress

to be achieved, the challenges need to be concretely defined and specific actions taken to achieve change.

This, in turn, leads us to consider how such change might be managed and achieved. Here two competing definitions arising from management theory are helpful: 1) 'To manage is to forecast and plan, to organize, to command, to coordinate and to control' (Fayol 1949, pp.5-6); 2) 'To manage is simply to create the conditions under which the work will be done, and done well. Management is therefore about enabling (or empowering) effective action' (Paton 1991, p.101). These two approaches at least partially map to the definitions of development given above: the first being a managed process to achieve defined objectives, the second being a process of enablement which defers to existing power structures. Thus, in practice, this leaves us with two broad approaches to development: either to provide enabling support in the context of historical change processes, or to design and manage deliberate efforts to promote change. As I shall discuss further below, in practice these are not necessarily mutually incompatible.

In my experience, the best development projects engage productively with both these trends by seeking to work on two levels. Good projects adopt specific actions which mitigate the impact of poverty and marginalisation, whilst simultaneously seeking to inform changes to those socio-economic institutions that create the situation to which they are responding to in the first place. Deliberate efforts to mitigate the impact of poverty and marginalisation tend to be more straight forward in design. Such projects might include inoculation campaigns, educational infrastructure development, livelihood skills training, etc. The more significant

challenge, however, is genuinely to drive processes of historic change. This largely depends upon the motivation within existing power structures to actually support such change. Consequently, the specific local context of development is crucial. For example, less democratic societies are unlikely to be keen to challenge the status quo, unless it is in their interest. This is where human development efforts differ from standard management approaches, which are more appropriate to production processes. Societal, as well as fundamental human, needs must be taken into account, and as such participation and representation of the disempowered in development projects are essential if lasting change is to be achieved. The motivating force for a given development project is always the key question to be answered. At the same time, however, it is one that goes far beyond any individual project: Why is development important on the global stage? What is its purpose and its ideal(ised) end goal? What factions are involved? Who are the stakeholders? Who defines the intended outcomes and the actions to achieve them?

### **A Brief History of Development**

Drawing on the two definitions of development set out above, for me, development has always been about the sharing and exploration of ideologies and practices that are intended to promote economic and social improvements in the lives of people and their environment. In order to contextualise my approach to development, and how I see the role of the contemporary development sector, it is useful to give a brief overview of the history of development, a history which is, of course, inextricably intertwined with the history of colonialism. Here I focus predominantly (but not exclusively) on the nature of development in sub-Saharan Africa, where I have worked during most of my professional life.

## **The Berlin Conference 1884**

Prior to the Berlin Conference in November 1884, sub-Saharan Africa had been the subject of an informal kind of imperialism by European powers for several centuries, focussed on trade and economic exploitation. Principal within this was the slave trade — the first slave fort having been established by Portuguese traders in 1482 in Elmina on the coast of the nation that is now Ghana. Trade was generally established through treaties with local leaders, creating preference and conflict within indigenous power structures to gain economic advantage. This meant that trade was largely focussed on the coastal zones of the continent. In the early Nineteenth Century, exploration of the interior of the continent advanced, pushed on by the pursuit of more diverse products for trade and raw materials to fuel the industrial revolution in Europe and North America, as well as new markets for surplus manufactured products. Yet even in the 1870s, it is estimated that still only 10% of the continent was under the direct control of European powers.

By the late Nineteenth Century imperial powers saw the lack of regulation of colonialism across the continent as a risk to the balance of power in Europe. An economic depression across Europe in the early 1870s meant that European economies were seeking new markets to aid their continued recovery. A united and strengthened Germany had begun to develop interests in Africa, creating concern that this might provoke renewed conflict. King Leopold II of Belgium was keen to secure his own interests in the Congo Basin and convinced France and Germany that a free trade agreement in Africa would help avoid wars. This helped create a

consensus that the negotiation of a shared policy for control and trade in Africa was essential. The conference itself was convened by Portugal and hosted by the German Chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, in November 1884. Thirteen European powers attended, along with representation from the USA. The result was the General Act of the Conference of Berlin in 1885. This defined the agreed principles of colonisation, banned the slave trade and divided the continent between European powers, creating 50 territories based on lines of latitude and longitude. No Africans were invited to the conference or contributed to the Act, despite common agreement amongst the nations present that it would benefit the continent (Chamberlain 1974, pp.44-60).

Colonialism was defined through the agreement of the principle of 'effective occupation' (Chamberlain 1974, p.109). This confirmed that colonial powers would only have rights and recognised possession over a territory on the basis of four qualifying principles:

- A colonial administration was in place;
- A colonial police force was in place to maintain order;
- Treaties were in place with indigenous leaders;
- The colonial power flew their flag there.

What followed the Berlin Conference is what was described in 1884 by British newspaper *The Times* as 'the scramble for Africa' (Pella 2015, p.173). European powers sought to consolidate existing interests, whilst taking advantage of areas which had been disputed by others. There was a shift from informal imperialism, via

economic influence, to a direct colonial imperialism against the agreed principles. The necessary treaties were often achieved through force and coercion. A series of imperial wars against indigenous powers followed, including the French in West Africa, the British in Egypt and Sudan and the Boer Wars in South Africa. Such was the pace and escalation of colonialism that by the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, 90% of the continent was under direct colonial rule (Chamberlain 1974, p.129).

### **Post-War Consensus and the United Nations**

During the first half of the Twentieth Century, the power structures of the colonial world continued to be shaped by the decisions taken at the Berlin Conference. During the Second World War, however, things began to change. The first step was the creation of the Atlantic Charter by the USA and the United Kingdom on 14 August 1941. The eight principles within the charter sought to ensure that, once fascism was defeated, nations would not seek to expand their territories; they would respect the democratic choice of their citizens; improve social security; assure equal access to materials for economic development; commit to the abandonment of force; and adopt a shared approach to security (Roosevelt and Churchill 1941). This eventually led on 24 October 1945 to the creation of the United Nations.

The purpose of the United Nations Organisation is defined in its founding charter according to four central principles. The first of these is to maintain international peace and security. Second, the UN aims to develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace. Third, it strives to achieve international co-operation in solving international problems

of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion. Finally, it sees itself as a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment of these common ends. That said, for all the inclusive rhetoric of its founding principles, in terms of peace and security, the main influence in the United Nations continues to rest with the permanent members of the Security Council: the UK, USA, China, Russia and France.

### **The Bretton Woods Conference**

As this new global mechanism for pursuing peace and security was being developed during the War, there was an accompanying debate amongst the Allied nations regarding the development of a new international financial system which would support the reconstruction of nations when peace came. There was also a desire to ensure that within this financial system there would be mechanisms which avoided creating the conditions which followed the First World War and which ultimately precipitated the Second World War, just as the UN Charter sought to avoid the mistakes of its predecessor the League of Nations.

The Bretton Woods Conference in 1944 was the culmination of this debate. It was attended by representatives from the 44 Allied nations at the time, with the UK, the USA, France, China and the Soviet Union dominating the proceedings and outcomes. The result of the conference was the creation of two key international mechanisms: the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the aim of which was to oversee an — at the time — largely unregulated market-led foreign exchange rate

system, in order to promote the international flow of funds in a stable manner, and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD). This was initially established to facilitate loans for reconstruction and the economic development of those nations decimated by the Second World War. The creation of these international mechanisms marked the end of the economic nationalism that had been central to the colonial era, removing barriers to the flow of capital across borders and establishing free trade as central to the global financial system. Each nation present was given membership of the IMF, with membership of the IBRD dependent on them taking this up. However, voting rights within each institution were dependent upon the capital contributions made by members. As the USA possessed half of all global wealth at the establishment of these institutions, it was able to exert the greatest influence over the decisions taken at the conference. This, in turn, led to the country's eventual dominance of the global economy in the post-War era.

US Foreign Policy at this time also had a formative effect on the development of international institutions beyond those already mentioned here. In 1947 the Truman Doctrine was announced. This was focussed on the containment of Soviet influence and ideology as a means of protecting US interests, whilst avoiding military intervention. Conditional financial aid was central to this policy. The European Recovery Programme, or Marshall Plan, for the reconstruction of Western Europe provided finance on condition of the pursuit of European integration, free-market economics and the guarantee that a large proportion of the \$13bn committed by the plan would be spent on suppliers within the USA (The Foreign Assistance Act 1948). In order to administer this scheme, European beneficiary nations established the Committee of European Economic Co-ordination, which later became the

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 1949, and which itself informed the eventual establishment of the European Economic Community in 1957.

The harmony that existed between the objectives of the Marshall Plan and those of the IBRD at this time is significant to note. US Foreign Policy in other parts of the world also reflected its central wish to stem the spread of Soviet ideology. This informed economic interventions in South America and South East Asia. However, US foreign policy saw sub-Saharan Africa as essentially being available for European powers to exploit economically for their own reconstruction, which in turn aided the USA's central foreign policy objective. Following the completion of the reconstruction of Europe, the IBRD created a new arm in 1960 — the International Development Association (IDA). The aim of this branch was to provide low-interest loans and grants to the world's poorest countries to aid their development, funded by member state subscriptions to the IBRD (World Bank 2017). These loans, which continue today, are conditional on nations implementing pro-growth and poverty-reducing domestic policies aligned with those defined by the IDA. The IBRD and the IDA are together known as the World Bank (World Bank 2017).

### **Neo-Colonialism**

The establishment of global systems of peace keeping, human rights and economic management framed the principles of international economic and social development in the second half of the Twentieth Century. However, the power of the USA and the European nations in defining what this comprised cannot be underestimated. It is important to consider the form and impact of this in sub-Saharan Africa alongside the

Conference of Berlin. In both instances, the ambitions of the peoples of Africa were considered inferior to the ambitions of the wealthier and more powerful nations who set the terms of trade and political control. African voices were absent in both cases. Social development was essentially seen as a natural consequence of economic development. At the Conference of Berlin, the needs of people in Africa were assumed, the continent often defined as 'dark' and requiring civilisation — a perspective informed by anthropological and evolutionary theories of the time, which were little more than a form of racism that promoted the inferiority of African peoples:

No rational man, cognizant of the facts, believes that the average negro is the equal, still less the superior, of the white man. And if this be true, it is simply incredible that, when all his disabilities are removed, and our prognathous relative has a fair field and no favour, as well as no oppressor, he will be able to compete successfully with his bigger-brained and smaller-jawed rival, in a contest which is to be carried out by thoughts and not by bites (Huxley 1871, p.20).

At the point of the establishment of the United Nations most sub-Saharan African nations remained under the rule of the founding signatories. It was not until 1957 that Ghana became the first sub-Saharan nation to gain its independence, followed by Guinea in 1958, a further thirty-five nations over the course of the 1960s and a further eight by 1980. Subscription to the international mechanisms described in this chapter was not optional for new nations seeking to develop themselves and to deliver the mandate given by their people. In doing so, alignment with the basic economic-political framework set by the North Atlantic alliance was obligatory. This would appear to be in conflict with the principles of self-determination at the heart of the UN Charter. The first President of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, made this explicit, characterising the new, ostensibly *postcolonial*, world order as one shaped, instead, by neo-colonial forces:

The essence of neo-colonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international

sovereignty. In reality, its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside (Nkrumah 1965, p.3).

In the latter half of the Twentieth Century, sub-Saharan Africa did not only experience neo-colonialism from the dominant North Atlantic economies. It was also subject to Soviet Russian influence. In both cases, this included the transfer of capital for development in return for preferential terms of trade for those materials needed to fuel reconstruction and economies in the Northern hemisphere. This led to mass development projects and programmes, framed as humanitarian aid or as kick-starting undeveloped economies, but which also gave donor nations ideological influence and preferential treatment. As an example of this one might mention how, in the 1960s, Soviet Russia's allies in Cuba commenced a programme of medical diplomacy, providing and training hundreds of medical professionals for African nations each year, a programme that continues today (Huish 2013). While this is generally held to be a valuable initiative, there were also many projects poorly considered, including large infrastructure projects designed by external agencies to boost economic activity, with little regard for the specific domestic context. These include the Norwegian-funded Lake Turkana fish processing plant in Kenya, the failure of which was seen as a consequence of the fact that potential yields were never adequately assessed and that the Turkana people are nomadic pastoralists, with no history of keeping or eating fish (Kolding 1989).

Some African nations sought to assume a 'non-aligned' position in terms of an increasingly binary geo-political environment. The Casablanca Group was established in 1961, comprising seven nations committed to Pan African federalism, similar to the European Economic Community, which eventually contributed to the

establishment of the Organisation of African Unity and the African Development Bank (Endeley 2009, pp.7-9). Ghana was a member of this bloc and Kwame Nkrumah led by example, proclaiming his intent to seek investment from states regardless of political preference, his focus being on the achievement of Ghana's own sovereign development objectives. This was exemplified in the case of the Volta Dam project. The project was originally identified during British colonial rule but was taken up by the new nation as a means of providing valuable fresh water and sustainable electricity, and fuelling a bauxite processing plant for the export of aluminium. Nkrumah's non-aligned position in relation to seeking investment alarmed the USA and the British, who had a more polarised view on such matters, as the then UK Prime Minister Sir Alec Douglas-Home made clear at the time (as reported by the US Secretary of State). The Prime Minister was apparently 'very worried about Ghana. Nkrumah has gone very close to being Communist. If the United States took away its aid to the Volta project, it was his opinion that Ghana would go right over to the Russians who would supply the money for the Volta Dam' (US Secretary of State 1964). The conclusion of the project saw Ghana held to ransom over the foreign investment. The final terms saw the US company Kaiser Aluminium granted rights to 80% of the electricity produced by, what is now known as, the Akosombo Dam for a period of thirty years, with an option on a further twenty (Valco 2018). They also imported bauxite rather than using Ghana's own reserves. The benefit to Ghanaians was a fraction of what was originally intended. This cost Nkrumah his Presidency through a coup in 1966, after which he never returned to Ghana. Democracy was largely absent in Ghana for 25 years after this, and there was little social or economic development. This was a pattern repeated across sub-

Saharan nations in a period absent of true self-determination, a period which lasted from the 1960s until the collapse of the Soviet bloc in 1991.

The situation was more complex still by the 1980s, during which time neo-liberalism became the dominant paradigm. This changed the terms of development and the form of neo-colonialism that was most prevalent. The economic nationalism that had been central to the success of many of the more developed nations in the Northern hemisphere was further eroded, the interest of capital itself being the key factor. Surplus capital from corporations and individuals in developed nations in the North increasingly controlled the terms of trade, with international finance institutions encouraging pro-growth free trade in the South. Economies in the North remained protected through the establishment of trading blocs, international agreements on tariffs and the setting of standards for imported products beyond the capabilities of many less developed countries.

### **Development Goals**

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 saw a change in the post-war world order. Over the course of the decade there were a series of UN-led conferences considering the key issues facing global society and the role that the UN itself could play in the Twenty-First Century in this new environment. This culminated in the Millennium Summit in New York in September 2000, where the member nations of the UN ratified the Millennium Declaration. This had eight chapters, from which the Millennium Development Goals were developed, in line with work previously completed by the OECD (UN 2000). The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set out eight goals with 61 specific targets. The agreement on the MDGs represented a

moment in development history when there was a shared belief in the ability of coordinated action to eradicate poverty through the power of contemporary social and economic policy. This emerged from apparent consensus in the late 1990s that, in a post-Soviet world, prospects for broad cooperation to achieve transformational change were good — that there was an opportunity to disseminate democracy, combined with trade liberalisation, to improve lives.

Figure 1.1 The Millennium Development Goals:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Global partnership for development

The MDGs had many successes, such as the reduction by one third in deaths due to malaria, which saved millions of lives, or the halving of the number of people living on one dollar a day globally (UN 2015a, p.6). However, criticisms of the goals reflected the tendency of implementation to mirror the interests of the power embedded within the international institutions involved. Most notably, the goals themselves were developed in a vertical, top down manner. In the tradition of earlier initiatives outlined in this chapter, there continued to be little evidence of the voices of those the goals were seeking to support being considered in their formulation or evaluation. Consideration of existing resources amongst target communities was also not evident. This contributed to an uneven distribution of impact amongst those countries targeted, not to mention the very noticeable gaps in the coverage of the MDGs (Sarwar 2015). One billion people — 15% of the global population — live with

some form of disability. It is recognised that disability prevalence is also far higher in less developed countries and that disability tends to be associated with higher levels of social and economic exclusion (World Bank 2018). Frustratingly, however, there was no specific consideration given to disability in the goals.

There was also a tendency to focus on donor achievements rather than development impacts in their monitoring and evaluation — the main mechanisms being economic in nature. In 2005 the G8 nations met in the UK and agreed to provide sufficient funds to support the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative, cancelling the debt of those countries that had already signed up to the World Bank's Highly Indebted Poor Countries initiative. This was conditional on continued adherence to the economic policies set out in return for the finance provided (IMF 2015). It is estimated that only one third of the funds committed to the MDGs went directly to interventions to achieve targets within the least developed nations. Around 50% of the total funding committed to the goals went to debt relief — the belief being that nations could commit the finance released to pursuing the goals on their own account. National ownership of what were externally developed targets amongst less developed countries was assumed, and this assumption again contributed to an uneven distribution of impact (Kenny and Sumner 2011). Significantly, the biggest advances in relation to the targets set by the MDGs were made in China: a nation that chose to take no notice of them. This, of course, raises questions regarding the impact attributed to the goals and the difficulty in monitoring and evaluating accurately on such a global scale.

## Sustainable Development Goals

In June 2012 the UN member states assembled in Brazil for the Rio +20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UN 2015b). Agreement was reached at this conference to build on the achievements of the MDGs. There was consensus that the MDGs had been relatively successful, but that they had not gone far enough. It was agreed that the successor programme must be more holistic in nature, addressing human development, social justice, the environment and poverty, and including all nations, rather than just the poorest. After three years of consultations amongst UN member states in both the North *and* the South, in August 2015 at the UN headquarters, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* was presented and formally agreed in September of the same year. This set out the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) to be achieved by 2030, within which there are 169 specific targets (UN 2015a).

### **Figure 1.2 The Sustainable Development Goals:**

1. No poverty
2. Zero hunger
3. Good health and well-being
4. Quality education
5. Gender equality
6. Clean water and sanitation
7. Affordable and clean energy
8. Decent work and economic growth
9. Industry, innovation and infrastructure
10. Reduced inequalities
11. Sustainable cities and communities
12. Responsible consumption and production
13. Climate action
14. Life below water
15. Life on land
16. Peace, justice and strong institutions
17. Partnerships for the goals

The first thing that jumps out from this list is the increase in both the number of goals and targets — the SDGs more than doubling the MDGs. This has attracted a good deal of criticism within the development sector, with many considering the SDGs to be somewhat sprawling and unfocussed. There also seems to be some internal tensions between the SDGs, particularly those focussed on economic growth, on the one hand, and environmental protection on the other. With the launch of the SDGs, the UK-based Overseas Development Institute produced a detailed analysis of the goals in relation to their potential to achieve their targets by 2030, based on current economic and social structures globally, as well as current rates of change. This concluded that although it was likely that some progress would be made, given the current trends, none of the 17 goals were on course to reach their targets by 2030. Of the 17 only three might be achieved with slight reform, nine would require a policy 'revolution' and five would require a reversal of existing trends. They projected that inequality was likely to persist, people would continue to go hungry each day and large portions of the global population would still live in large urban slums. The environmental and climate change targets would also be missed (Nicolai et al. 2015).

Since the launch of the SDGs in 2015, the world has moved in a direction that appears even less likely to support their achievement. Economic development within the established order of international cooperation, global trade and capital transfer at the time of their conception was considered fundamental to their delivery — the dominant theory of change at the heart of the goals being that social development is dependent on economic development amongst less developed nations. The current trend towards populist and economically nationalist governments in Europe and America is unlikely to be supportive of this. In 1970, 30 member states of the OECD,

known as the Development Assistance Committee, agreed to work towards contributing 0.7% of GNI to overseas development assistance (OECD 2018). By 2017, only six of these nations had reached this target, one of them being the UK. Like the SDGs themselves, the achievement of this target is also threatened by today's political climate, not least the 'anti-aid lobby' which is currently in the ascendency in more developed nations, a vocal minority that seeks to divert common support from the 0.7% commitment towards domestic policy initiatives (Sheldrick 2017). Without all thirty nations fully committing to this target, and the logic behind it, it is unlikely that we will see the achievement of the SDGs by 2030.

### **Why Participation and Creativity?**

It is not only the anti-aid lobby that is critical of international development agencies described in this chapter. There has also been a good deal of criticism from the dense network of non-governmental organisations that have grown up in the post-war period, and particularly in the last two decades, aimed at mobilising *support* for aid. Bond, for example is a UK network for international development agencies, a 400-member organisation with a history of creating and debating alternative approaches to development that engage with the social and knowledge capital of nations rather than their economic assets alone. Questions have been raised, via Bond, around the ways in which policies based upon sets of predominantly economic ideologies, beliefs and values are not necessarily those that represent the best interests of the population of the less developed world (Harris 2017). In so doing, Bond and other organisations highlight the central contradiction that exists within the dominant international institutions of global development (the UN Charter, the World Bank etc.), that I have pointed to in this chapter, namely the incompatibility of the

principle of self-determination with the imposition of domestic policies by these institutions on those who seek capital for their own development.

The debates one finds expressed through Bond, as well as the agencies it supports, around the relationship between human development and economics are invariably strongly influenced by the work of thinkers such as Amartya Sen, Paulo Freire and Antonio Gramsci, thinkers that have also been hugely influential on my own work as a development professional, and on my understanding of the value of participation and creativity. Be it Sen's notion of economic development as an integrated process of substantive and interconnected 'freedoms' that are mutually reinforcing in nature (Sen 1999), Freire's dialectical approach to education and the concomitant processes of 'conscientization' this can set in train (Freire 1968, p.9), or Gramsci's understanding of the 'organic intellectual' who can challenge the dominant hegemony from within by valuing and mobilising 'subaltern' knowledge (Gramsci 1971, p.202), contemporary development thinking is rooted in the notion of the 'participation' of the less-developed world being an active agent in constructing its own development pathways.

As noted in the introduction to this volume, this became particularly visible towards the end of the Twentieth Century, when there was a move away from 'top down' linear forms of project development and implementation towards more grass-roots informed participatory forms. And as we can see from our discussion of the formation of the SDGs, in the Twenty-First Century it has even started to have an impact on the thinking of the major development institutions. Practice and policy has been challenged and transformed by a range of stakeholders, from grassroots community

movements to institutions such as the World Bank. The varied range of interests in the move towards participatory development should, however, be considered in relation to two distinct definitions of participation.

First, there is the 'Social Movement' definition of participatory development. This is generally conceptualised as a process of empowerment whereby people mobilise in response to matters of inequality or poverty, the engagement of external stakeholders being subject to the approval of the people themselves in a dialogue-based partnership. This form of participation is commonplace around the world, prime examples being those small civil society organisations which self-mobilise in response to specific issues of economic or social marginalisation (e.g. a parents' group pursuing inclusion of children living with disability in school.). Then there is the 'Institutional Movement' definition of participatory development. This frequently involves the engagement of the recipients of development in research which informs the creation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of externally-led interventions, usually framed around project management structures. One example of this is UNICEF's State of the World's Children reports, which collect, collate and analyse data to inform policy on a regular basis (UNICEF 2017). Participatory development has created a degree of common ground amongst the more grassroots movements and larger international institutions, the former seeing it as a means of creating access to power, the latter seeing it as a means of implementing projects more effectively.

Participatory development should also be considered in relation to the principles of participatory democracy, within which citizens are continuously and actively involved

in the public decisions that affect their lives, directing and informing policy, rather than only engaging periodically, in the way that representative democracy requires. Such active engagement can be seen as beneficial for individual members of society, strengthening the entirety of democratic systems. Participatory development can also be considered in terms of power and freedom. It is evident from history that where peoples are denied access to the structures of power then it is highly likely that they will seek alternative routes to power, not all of which will be peaceful. One example of the potential of participatory democracy is the city of Porto Alegre in Brazil. In the late 1980s, as Brazil began to emerge from dictatorship, the norm was that violent suppression was the response to opposition to policy, which in turn bred further violent protest. In 1989 the newly formed Workers Party gained municipal power in Porto Alegre and instituted a participatory approach to budgeting and public expenditure management. This used an annual participatory process which engaged the residents of Porto Alegre in defining priorities and judging performance. This process was then used to define budget and management priorities. The results were impressive. As the World Bank notes in its case study report on the city:

Between 1989 and 1996, the number of households with access to water services rose from 80% to 98%; percentage of the population served by the municipal sewage system rose from 46% to 85%; number of children enrolled in public schools doubled; in the poorer neighbourhoods, 30 kilometres of roads were paved annually since 1989; and because of transparency affecting motivation to pay taxes, revenue increased by nearly 50% (budget resources for investment only went up from US\$ 54m in 1992 to US\$ 70m in 1996) (World Bank 2003, p.3).

However, the critical issue with participatory approaches is where we locate the motivating force for development. In the writing of Freire, Gramsci and Sen, there is an assumption that action will disrupt the hegemony from within, in the process helping to transform the situation for the poor and the marginalised. The danger

within the contemporary development sector is that this disruption is externally motivated and in fact comes from, and ultimately helps to reinforce, the dominant hegemony. Such forms of participation can, as a result, be perceived as co-option by the hegemony and so can generate as much cynicism as they do engagement. Or they can lead to participants second-guessing the ostensible intentions of the donor, rather than entering into a process of genuine two-way engagement.

In considering this I would offer an example from my own experience. In the late 1990s I was evaluating a rural community development project in the Northern Region of Ghana in West Africa. I visited a small village where the local farmers' cooperative had been offered support. They were provided with the funds to purchase a farm cart, a plough and a bullock, the intention being to enable them to plough their land without using expensive tractor services which were damaging the fragile soils. The bullock would also provide them with manure to improve the quality of crops, as well as a means to transport their produce to market. During my meeting with the farmers' cooperative I discovered that they had secured the plough and the cart, but the bullock they bought had died within a week of purchase. The farmers had sold the deceased bullock for meat and used the income to pay for tractor ploughing services for the season. As a result, the actual impact of the project had been much less than intended.

In our discussion, it became clear that the farmers had no prior experience, or knowledge, of animal traction in their community, which in part had resulted in the purchase of a defective bullock. Yet they had been consulted on the type of support they wanted by the implementing agency and had chosen this. They explained that

they had made this choice as they had observed that a neighbouring community had been given an animal traction project by the same agency. Memorably one of the farmers told me that 'when a stranger offers you a gift you accept it, as maybe next time you will get what you really need.' I still consider this statement to be the mantra of the disempowered. At the inception of the project, the implementing agency used what they believed to be a participatory process. However, this did not account for the power that they themselves brought into the interaction. The power dynamics were not sufficiently addressed to challenge the lack of belief amongst the farmers that they had agency to define their own needs and solutions. Nor did they necessarily possess the skills or familiarity with the project concepts assumed by the implementing agency. Instead the farmers aimed for what their acquired knowledge informed them that they could get from those they perceived as knowing better. The officers interacting with the community were from an educated and well-resourced section of Ghanaian society, with intellectual and strategic links to national and international initiatives, far removing them from the experience of the farmers. The farmers were focussed on making sure they maximised the opportunity as they saw it — but this was never communicated to those people who set up the project, or fully explored.

In this example, the motivating power for the intervention lay with the implementing agency rather than the community. This mimics the observer's paradox, i.e. the notion that it is not possible to observe a phenomenon in the state it exists when not being observed. Essentially the farmers were subordinate to the dominant hegemony, despite a process of participation. The question is how do we achieve the advantages that can come from full participation, surmounting this challenge, to

create the circumstances by which the disruption, or motivating force, for systemic change comes from the disempowered themselves? How can we assure that participatory processes are not simply a mechanism through which the dominant hegemony is perpetuated? Experience suggests to me that real empowerment comes alongside deep trust in communities or target groups along side long processes of mutual education. This tends to be hard won, and often beyond the harsh reality of the timescales set by funding cycles. I have also been fortunate to meet incredibly talented communicators with an innate ability to establish trust rapidly. However, this is not something that is easily replicated or scaled up.

Turning now to the role of the arts in participatory development, participatory arts can help create the opportunity for the disempowered to lead such disruption and establish the motivating force for development themselves. Of course, creating a disruption to the status quo has the potential to place the disempowered in a place of risk, which may in turn create a response which increases marginalisation. Such disruption may also involve broaching taboos or sharing personal and damaging experiences. What I have found in my work is that participatory arts have the potential to reduce these risks, by placing the issues to be addressed in a creative space which can be depersonalised, offering a level of credible anonymity to the authors while also communicating messages that can stimulate debate, challenge consensus and invite dialogue, all of which can lead to positive transformation. This creative space is where the disempowered may use their imagination to *create power* by depicting problems, exploring potential solutions to these problems and identifying the benefits of the solutions to stakeholders. This can then help define pathways to achieve change outside of this creative space.

Whilst working in Recife in Pernambuco, North East Brazil I worked with GTP+, or *Grupo de Trabalhos em Prevenção Posithivo* (Workers for Positive Prevention), a non-governmental organisation working to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS, as well as promoting the rights of people living with HIV/AIDS. At the heart of the organisation's campaigning work was the use of forum theatre — a form of interactive drama performance that engaged service users and the general public to explore issues around HIV/AIDS (Boal 1979). GTP+ made impressive use of street theatre and flash mob style theatre to challenge negative assumptions around issues of transvestitism, sex workers, HIV/AIDS and other issues which are very much taboo and can be the impetus for violence within Brazilian society. In doing so, they used popular characters drawn from within Pernambucan traditional culture (with which the audience would readily identify), placing them into contemporary situations in order to help contextualise the issues that the group wished to explore. By doing so, GTP+ challenged, informed and engaged people in promoting respect for diversity, as well as raising awareness of the issues around HIV/AIDS.

Similarly, within my current work with the Bishop Simeon Trust in South Africa we have worked closely with the Centre for World Cinemas and Digital Cultures at the University of Leeds to develop a youth empowerment model with participatory arts at its heart (see Chapter 12 of this book). In South African society, generational divides and social institutions tend to marginalise younger people, who themselves are subject to many of the most acute problems of poverty. This affects a large part of the population, 39% of which is under 19 years old. We have used forum theatre, singing, dancing, comic production and community filmmaking to help groups of

young people explore sensitive issues, including poverty, physical and mental abuse and HIV/AIDS. This is now helping them to build campaigns, using participatory arts to engage their peers to inform behaviours, as well as to influence the decisions of policy makers in their communities. We believe that this will have long term benefits in terms of citizenship, democratic engagement and the resolution of those issues which effect children the most, but whose knowledge and experience has often been neglected in strategies developed to address them. It is our ambition to embed this work in national policy in South Africa.

## **Conclusions**

The history of international development is one that is characterised by the dominance of external forces upon the economic and social development of nations, whether this comes from the interests at the heart of the Conference of Berlin, the economic power that shaped the United Nations or the ideological frameworks that helped form the Millennium Development Goals. The voices of those to whom development is 'done' have been too often neglected. This would seem to be the antithesis of the idea of development as a combination of freedoms, as defined, for example, by Sen. These freedoms denote a sense of the power of individuals and democratic societies which should form part of the neo-liberal democratic framework, but which tend to be secondary to purely economic measurements and mechanisms for development.

This should not be seen as a value judgement, but one which notes the ideological tensions that exist within development, i.e. that the wish to promote self-determination can be at odds with the power of capital and the systemic reality of

globalisation. If we accept that both sides of this imagined dichotomy have a shared interest in the improvement of society, then the question remains: how might we best achieve this? We should assume that for marginalised people focussed on survival there is little interest in the moral superiority of the proponents of economic growth or self-determination. Development models can benefit from processes that build on, and place greater value in, existing knowledge and capacity, where the disempowered are themselves mobilised in response to matters of inequality or poverty. This process of what we have described here as participatory democracy has the potential to strengthen representative democracy, assuring the greater accountability of elected representatives, whilst also providing a stronger evidence base to inform and influence development policy and action with more direct relevance to those that it is there to support.

This process is not inimical to economic development. Rather, it can enhance the potential of capital, as well as possessing the potential to respond to the dissatisfaction at the heart of an increasingly destabilised and fractured world. The example of Porto Alegre shows how participation can help generate a more 'satisfied' population (however this is defined). However, it can also have more easily measurable material benefits. In the case of Porto Alegre, participation led, for example, to improved water and sanitary health, education and urban infrastructure. These are all factors essential for economic development. A healthy, well-connected workforce, embedded within a strong knowledge economy, are essential to growth.

The prioritisation of economic development skews the balance of power to such a degree that, if we are to enable genuine participation, it is necessary to create a

disruption to the existing hegemony. In Freirian terms this necessitates a 'conscientisation' of the disempowered which engages them in a dialogue for development. To do this, we must make sure that people are able to challenge their place within the dominant hegemony and participate in (and thus contribute to) the global conversation on poverty, health and inequality on their own terms. If we wish to achieve effective social and economic development, then we must ensure that participatory development is strengthened. Participatory arts have an important role to play in the process of disruption, providing spaces where the disempowered may explore and define problems and potential solutions, rooted in their own knowledge and experience. Through art, the disempowered can imagine themselves as powerful, able to negotiate and contribute to the resolution of that which may appear immutable.

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