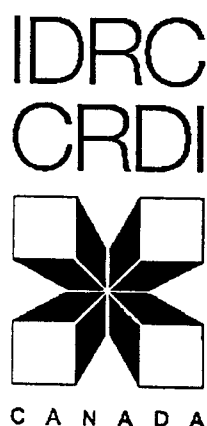


53242

IDRC - Lib



NOTES FOR REMARKS

BY

IVAN L. HEAD

PRESIDENT

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH CENTRE

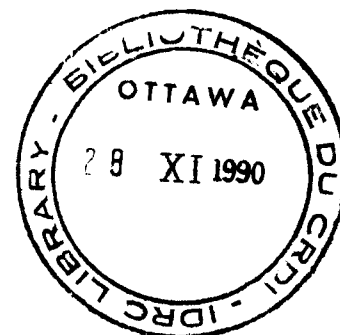
TO THE

INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM

ON

DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

**TOKYO, JAPAN
5 OCTOBER, 1990**



pp. 1-17

1571

18. 94

Since the beginnings of time, human beings have viewed the world about them as three dimensional. The first dimension was spatial, the second temporal, and the third conceptual. For much the greater portion of five millennia, these dimensions have been limited in scope and simple of understanding. The spatial dimension until only a century ago was for the most part formed by a radius equivalent to the distance that an individual could walk, or ride on a horse, in a single day. The temporal dimension, for most of the world, was measured in agricultural seasons. The conceptual dimension was simple; inside that travel perimeter were one's friends, outside were strangers.

From generation to generation, century after century, these dimensions have formed humankind's knowledge, humankind's cultures, humankind's attitudes. Ninety-five percent of recorded history has been essentially local. Ethnocentric and xenophobic instincts are buried deep within our genes. Activities and events beyond personal reach or personal knowledge have been matters of speculation at best, of disinterest always. The age of maritime exploration, the discovery of moveable type, and the commencement of scientific reasoning have all contributed to the erosion of this insularity, but only slowly and episodically. Even those societies that, for commercial or other reasons, reached out in the 16th to 19th centuries, retained a pervasive and quite inaccurate perspective of this planet and its biological systems.

As we all know, in the space of this single century in which we live, two of those dimensions have changed beyond all recognition. The horizon of distance has vanished entirely. Modern communications and transportation systems have made neighbours of every human being on this planet. The dimension of time is now so elastic that it is fundamentally different from what it was once understood to be. We measure certain electronics activities in micro-seconds, and even have a scientific symbol to represent it; we measure with equal accuracy the disintegration of unstable subnuclear particles in spans of thousands of years. Those accomplishments and this knowledge have permitted us to probe the outer reaches

of the solar system, to engage in biotechnological activities that alter the very rudiments of living species, to participate in commercial activities that are indifferent to geography and clocks, to become real-time television witnesses to events anywhere.

In scientific and technological terms we have released ourselves from the bonds of both spatial and temporal dimensions. The sole remaining constraint is the average life span of a human being, and even that is now subject to alteration. Yet what of the third dimension - the conceptual dimension? Not surprisingly, it has evolved very little and now remains many decades to the rear of the other two. In societies on every continent of the globe there remains a mental insularity that is so strong and so uncomprehending of the new dimensions of neighbourhood as to be not dissimilar to those of medieval communities. Educated persons know full well that they can travel across oceans and continents in a matter of hours, that they can telephone or otherwise communicate through those same spaces in a matter of seconds. Yet few have accepted the fact that those voluntary linkages have been joined by others that are now not only pervasive but are not subject either to selection or to severance. Much more connects communities in every segment of the globe than the schedules of airlines and the transmissions from orbiting communications satellites. In the course of less than half a century, our seemingly insatiable appetites have made each one of us subject to the activities of every other. By whatever criterion of measurement we select - demographic, economic, environmental, political - we are neighbours, and increasingly intimate neighbours. With a momentum that is difficult to comprehend, our mutual vulnerability is increasing.

- interest on the debt of the developing countries is now accumulating by 274 million US dollars per day;
- the population of the world is increasing by 9,000 persons per hour;
- net deposits of carbon in the atmosphere grow by 11,000 metric tonnes per minute.

Those figures, I hope, are as astonishing to you as they are to me each time I read them. I don't employ them for their shock value, however. These figures are not simply statistics. They are indicators of human welfare. They are the product of human activity taken, for the most part, without either awareness or concern for the impact on others. Some of those activities are more concentrated in the industrialized countries; many are not. In the developing countries, the endeavours of four billion people to survive and to improve even marginally their creature comforts have profound impacts upon everyone else. When forests are cut to produce wood for export, when coal is burned to generate electricity, and when pesticides are sprayed to protect crops, these activities affect the integrity of the single biosphere on which we all depend for survival. When economies anywhere fail to perform well, markets and investments everywhere diminish in value in lock step with descending standards of living. When burgeoning populations challenge the carrying capacity of available land masses, the outflow of refugees fleeing wretched and inhuman circumstance makes demands upon humanism and compassion elsewhere. When the dictates of common sense are ignored and the commerce of modern weapons systems is encouraged, all humans become hostage to quarrels anywhere. And when we in the North lock ourselves into our outdated conceptual dimensions, assuming that "we" are different from "they", that vast disparities in wealth are tolerable, that the environment will retain its resiliency, that physical security is still measured by military might, we reveal that our understanding of reality has been arrested in a time warp now tragically out of date.

Even when we seek to address these issues, however, we in the North tend to do so in a fashion so curiously cautious and so bereft of imagination that we deny any likelihood of adequate results. Were our scientists as cautious in their laboratories, or our businessmen in their offices, we would be living still in the pre-electronic era. With trepidation we approach the problems of the developing countries as if they were not our problems as well. With arrogance we assume

that our experience and our technologies are relevant and transferable. With cynicism we pretend that official development assistance is generous and effective even while net financial transfers are from South to North. And with inexcusable reluctance to change, we place in jeopardy the welfare of our children and our grandchildren.

This is my entry point in any discussion of development assistance. The questions I pose are not "what assistance?" or "what quantum of resources?". I ask "assistance for what?" and "resources for what?" Those questions may resonate strangely in the ears of persons dedicated to programs of development assistance and committed to their importance, or to international officials responsible for tracking aid flows. They are, however, as all politicians know, the kind of question that taxpayers ask. And when properly answered, I suggest, these are the questions that will ensure the enthusiastic support of the electorates for sensible, sensitive development assistance programs. Even on the eve of the 21st century, few of our countrymen or women - in Japan, in Canada, in any of the industrialized countries - have anything but the vaguest notions of the extent of environmental deterioration, economic uncertainty, social turbulence, and political instability now so endemic in many developing regions. Neither, I hasten to add, are they acquainted with many of the striking accomplishments and advances recorded in some developing countries. But of most concern to me, few are able to link any of these circumstances in the countries of the South with the inevitable consequences - both good and bad - that flow into the countries of the North. That is a product of our conceptual dimension. It is a limitation that we must overcome or be victims of our own intellectual myopia.

How, then, should we encourage our own societies to approach these North-South issues? Given the remarkable circumstances that have unfolded in Europe in recent months, we are able for the first time in four decades to view the world other than through the distorting lenses of ideological hostility. Clearly visible as the focus sharpens is the extent of human wretchedness in so many

countries. Sharply evident is the often absence of human dignity. Possible for the first time in the post-colonial period is the opportunity to consider the needs of the developing countries, and to respond to them on their own merits rather than as elements in an East-West power struggle.

All this being so, we in the North have an opportunity to view development in its entirety, not from this or that changing perspective depending upon cold war vicissitudes. This new holistic look will permit us to realize that because the ingredients of development are not confined to the economic sector, neither should development programs be so confined, as they often tend to be. Unquestionably, one of the major challenges facing the developing countries is the need to create wealth, yet wealth without more possesses little development impact and often increases the inequities so deeply and harmfully present in these countries. Unquestionably, poverty is at the root of the great majority of the festering developmental problems - poverty which contributes to low standards of health, poverty which diminishes the effectiveness of educational programs, poverty which contributes to social turbulence and political instability. Yet as within our own Northern societies, poverty alleviation, to be of sustained effect, requires more than direct transfers of wealth. If there is to be a sustainable development momentum, all relevant circumstances must be addressed and engaged in each society. Economic undoubtedly, but social as well, and cultural. In most countries in the South, major shifts in policy and attitude are required. Development cannot take place in the absence of fundamental societal change. We understand that from our own experiences - in Canada and in Japan - as our societies evolved. It is certainly understood in much of Eastern Europe today. It is understood as well, I am convinced, in many of the developing countries but in those instances we from the North represent part of the problem.

It is axiomatic that no society willingly submits to change by outside agents. The economy can be stimulated, of course. The health care sector can be redesigned. The educational structure can be strengthened.

The transportation system can be made more efficient. But these alone are insufficient. If the society is not dedicated to principles of equity and participation, if there is not present the rule of law, if there is not an institutionalized acceptance of human dignity and social justice, all those other improvements are marginal. These changes and these commitments must come from within, from the ranks of persons present in those countries who wish nothing more than the opportunity to begin the necessary processes. So long, however, as they are or are seen to be the instruments of outside forces, they are neutered. Even worse, so long as their efforts are countered by outside forces, as is so often the case, they are destroyed.

Two of my heroes, a Canadian by the name of Mike Pearson and a Japanese by the name of Saburo Okita, participated as members of a special World Bank Commission on International Development in the late sixties. They and their Commission associates understood this dilemma, and they addressed it. The title of their report was "Partners in Development". There was no sense of "we" and "they" in the views of these commissioners. The concept was "us".

If, then, we are all vulnerable to the great global processes now at play and if constructive responses, to be effective, must take the form of participation by all, it seems to me to be clear that the world is in need not only of new attitudes but of new policies and new mechanisms as well. The first category, attitude, can be addressed rather bluntly. The current sense of superiority that we in the North now project to the South is misplaced. Our arrogance is unjustified. Our record of environmental degradation, of resource consumption, of conflict, of greed is not the model that in our own interests we wish the developing countries to emulate. I have no illusions, however, that attitudinal change of this fundamental nature and of the range necessary will not be easy. The other elements may be easier to remedy. Although influenced by attitude, policies and mechanisms may be addressed in a more rational fashion.

Among my suggested policy prescriptions are any number of a withdrawal nature; the withdrawal or cessation by the countries of the North of practices which impact negatively upon the South and which more than offset the beneficial effects of enlightened development assistance policies. This list includes any number of pernicious commercial practices engaged in by some or all of the OECD countries and stoutly defended as marketplace norms. Among them are the active - often insistent - transfer from North to South of modern weapons systems, of tobacco and tobacco products, of inappropriate and often thermosensitive pharmaceuticals, of inadequately labelled toxic herbicides and pesticides, of dangerous industrial wastes, of highly subsidized agricultural produce. To be added to that list of course are such related policies as tariff and non-tariff barriers including the Multi-Fibre Arrangement and the range of bilateral and so-called "voluntary" restraints. And, of course, the current reluctance in so much of the North to address vigorously and effectively the strangling debt burden now sapping the strength of economies in the south.

Not all changes in the policy sector need be so contentious, however, as those that I have mentioned. One, and one that Japan understands and is to be commended for pursuing, is the declaration of importance and the dedication of effort to North-South issues along humanistic lines. Notwithstanding the conclusion of the Cold War, there remains an inclination on the part of some in the North to interpret events, to measure the quality of contribution, and to assess the worth of international citizenship, all on the basis of outmoded and self-defeating concepts of military power. The world in which we live is undoubtedly tumultuous, and unquestionably subject to the wrongful deeds of adventurers. We must be prepared to respond in multilateral fashion through effective United Nations channels. But we must not accept military confrontations as the normative course of human activity and power relationships as the norm. Generous, understanding, humane involvement in the international community must come to be regarded as necessary, as far and away the most effective use of national resources, and - eventually - as the

most laudable of all national pursuits. The great powers of the 21st century, in my judgement, will unquestionably be characterized by policy criteria of this kind, not of the size of unusable military arsenals.

My third category is that of mechanisms. Those governments of the North that are dedicating increased percentages of GNP to ODA are acutely aware of the increasing challenge effectively to utilize these resource increments. The most sensitive and the most experienced of ODA managers know full well that the types of change required within the developing countries cannot be imposed from without. More, they recognize that in many instances the present labour-intensive aid delivery mechanisms are no longer cost effective. Needed are new approaches. Immodestly, I offer my own organization as one such model. International in a novel way, non-interventionist but highly demanding, acceptable to developing countries because of its partnership attitudes, substance and image, IDRC is an example of the unorthodox mechanisms that can and must be designed and employed increasingly if we expect the developing countries to enhance their own competence, find their own solutions, become responsible for their own futures in an increasingly interdependent world. It is with immense pride that IDRC has watched individuals and institutions nurtured with our encouragement assume responsibilities, introduce changes, and make permanent contributions to the welfare and dignity of developing country societies. And those changes tend to be permanent because they come from within; they are part of the local cultural and societal expectations while all the while insistent on values and disciplines necessary for sustainable development.

These observations, Mr. Chairman, are made, I assure you, by one who is awed by the enormity of the challenges facing the human species now and in the years ahead but by one who is equally optimistic that these challenges can be met. Our generation, I am convinced, will not willingly go down in history as the first to have passed to a succeeding generation a world less wholesome and less viable than the one it inherited. If we are to meet this requirement of generational equity,

we must redefine modernism. The new definition will find virtue in creation, not in destruction; value in quality more than in quantity; one that is dedicated to sustainable practices.

The leadership increasingly displayed by the Government and people of Japan in this new and exciting international environment is to be commended. Japanese commitment to a more equitable and peaceful world, evidenced in such activities as this International Cooperation Day, encourage me to believe that my optimism is well placed.