No Security Required: The Danger of Boardroom-Driven Development

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Requests for Applications (RFA) for support of international development projects in Africa are increasingly required to directly address the issue of security. The demand seems quite reasonable as practitioners are at times plying their trade in conflict and post conflict zones. One could easily declare that development and security are inextricably linked. But are these two concepts merely *buzzwords* or perhaps *fuzzwords* to propel a funding conversation in the broadest terms to potential donors (Cornwell, 2007: 474)? Or is there a solid, indisputable, and universal meaning attached to both? In regards to the funding of development projects, is the nexus of both concepts required for a grant to be awarded and/or for a completed project to be evaluated as successful?

The definitions that guide program design are seldom thought about post-document submission, but they are never absent in a project's implementation in the field. Campaigns are weakened by a lack of internal reflection, organizational vision and diversity. There are many occasions when grants are awarded that not only fail to navigate important linkages such as security and development, but also fail to interrogate the concept of true partnership.

The dominant narratives engaging security and development during the Cold War era were less complicated. Today, a global unpacking of ideas that, at times, dismiss any notion of state sovereignty, would have to be maneuvered (Global Governance Watch, 2011). But it is impossible to avoid the age-old questions inherent to the definition of key terms; these include questions of agency, power, position, ethnicity, and race among others. The components above are central to any real exploration of global security and development. Unfortunately when the discourse is solely facilitated by western experts involved in an attempt to aid a "client" in the developing world, the professional lens through which development practitioners view the landscape is seldom considered and the voice of those they are attempting to *develop* often goes unheard (Anyangwe and Scott, 2013).

Confusion Reigns

A deeper, multi-layered address of major issues is often avoided in an effort to move forward an agenda favourable to donor interests. While this approach is far from new, fresh buzzwords drape current programs providing the appearance of inclusiveness. As a result, development policy and its practice have become more confused, contradictory, and complicated. For example, an NGO could be granted an award for conflict resolution in regions where the extractive industry sector dominates, without an adequate address of the role multinational corporations play in those disputes. In fact, solutions designed, sponsored or influenced by corporations are often offered as a cure-all for conflict, and government mismanagement is, in part at least, fuelled by those same organizations (Lahiri-Dutt, 2006: 15). Although the RFA may declare 'confront ethnic or gender violence,' or 'address poor governance' as a goal, there is seldom mention of corporate liability. A document awash in progressive sounding buzzwords need not include the concrete addressing of any issue to be awarded funding. Oftentimes, topics of concern are thrown in the air and land where they may in successful proposals.

The link between security and development is no different than the skyward toss of issues noted above. This is more likely when the voices of the beneficiaries of aid are not considered in project design – even when that project is well-

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meaning and sufficiently progressive sounding. According to David Chandler:

the growing awareness of complex independencies between every possible issue, from the environment to minority rights, seems guaranteed to incapacitate any clear way of prioritizing policy requirements. Rather than clarity, the security–development nexus sets up a framework where any external regulatory or interventionist initiative can be talked up by the proposing government or institution as being of vital importance (2007: 367).

Far from a bygone era, what the donor wants and what is driving that desire takes priority. Although linked, in the global business of aid, security and development are not inextricably connected.

Let's consider an example where development and security are in no way complementary. The delivery of food aid to the hungry in a war zone cannot be perceived as a complete development program success, when that aid is stolen by the same armed forces that in part created the need for the assistance. One could surmise that the development industry, in some instances, acts to make a region less secure. Herfried Munkler speaks of the role international aid plays in fueling "the local war economy" (2005: 18). Ideas that make a great deal of sense in a boardroom are at times very difficult to justify in the field.

Poverty is Pathological

When seeking donor aid, the applicant has to be aware of the interests of the funder. This is especially important when the hopeful candidate is applying to a government agency. Voters and taxpayers who won't make time for nuanced discourse on poverty and inequality are more open to supporting a program that in theory will ensure their personal safety in what has been perceived by many as an increasingly dangerous world. For many in the West, keeping the wave of televised terror and chaos contained (if not eliminated), is a wise investment. The securitization of development aid fits comfortably within a broader national and human security conversation.

Containment of the threat, however defined, not only prevents the spread of *dangerous* ideology, the impetus for the Cold War, but of being the victim of a politically motivated attack staged at a Western office complex, mass transit network, or shopping mall. What might lie behind those very rare occurrences is less important to the taxpayer in the West than preventing such events from happening. The need for linkage becomes immediate and real for the average citizen when it is conducted to "insulate 'the West' from the effects and corollaries on conflict in developing states and regions" (Beswick and Jackson, 2011: 22). Dealing with a security threat in some distant, troubled locale prevents a need for the West to address the issue; this is an acceptable case of NIMBY writ large.

The notion that the poverty of the developing world could be linked to the exploitation of natural resources and labor by the developed world, best captured by Third World intellectuals and activists in the 1960s and 70s, was replaced in the 1980s by the "liberal reproblematisation of underdevelopment as dangerous" (Duffield, 2001: 23). With this position embedded within global aid philosophy since the Reagan era, an old question, perhaps rephrased, re-emerges: Can one rationally collaborate with a community of dangerous people? It would surely stand to reason that this grouping deserves only to be *led* to viable solutions to poverty. In the development profession, especially after the isolation and exclusion of Third World intellectuals in Western conversations on aid, programs "of empowerment and sustainability are largely refracted through a lens of behavioural and attitudinal change" (Duffield, 2001: 42). A program based around notions of change presupposes that something is inherently wrong with the values of the "client."

The funding-worthy, societal ills engaged by theorists and put to practice by development workers are not exclusive to the world's poorest countries. There are global consequences for not addressing root causes. How can one explain the data showing an increase in homicides in Latin America in the last decade when a much poorer and less politically stable African continent has seen rates of murder decline during the same period (Fearon, 2011)? If security and development are indivisibly connected, the chances of being a victim of homicide in Africa would be much higher than in a more developed Latin America. While one crime is perceived as a domestic concern, another with the same result and arguably the same motivation becomes one for the international community to "workshop and conference" as if the phenomena itself is caused solely by a failure to democratically govern.

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Does Inequality Threaten Security?

Let's argue that development cannot be achieved without security. But is it necessary for the benefits of development to reach the masses for a country to be graduated to a higher level on the development scale? A global economy measured in terms of GDP certainly does not demand it. If GDP above any other factor remains the measure of a nation's success, extreme wealth and poverty can coexist as long as the economy expands overall. A recent Oxfam report examines the staggering rate of global economic inequality and the threat this disparity poses to democracy and stability. Since the 1980s, "The wealth of the world is divided in two: almost half going to the richest one percent; the other half to the remaining 99 percent" (Fuentes-Nieva and Galasso, 2014: 1). If the world is partitioned in this manner it seems possible – even probable – that definitions of security and development would differ. Those living in the housing estate on the hill would likely view the world much differently than those residing in the informal settlement beneath it.

Based on Oxfam's latest report on inequality, the development practitioner should be willing to question how secure a world is where in its largest economy, the United States, "the wealthiest one percent captured 95 percent of post-financial crisis growth since 2009, while the bottom 90 percent became poorer" (Fuentes-Nieva and Galasso, 2014: 3). Perhaps the use of these statistics could be spun as selective usage of data to support *lightweight* post-development theory. Despite the quantitative evidence to the contrary, a critic might still argue that the figures are no different than what David Lehmann believes to be a copious use of Foucault to support an ill-informed desire to overhaul the entire development industry (Lehmann, 1997).

Recent surveys indicate that a growing number of people are greatly disturbed by the high rate of inequality and what effect it has on their lives and life chances (Fuentes-Nieva and Galasso, 2014: 10). Maybe Oxfam is being too left-wing by focusing on inequality. With the ever shifting priorities of the development industry, maybe this focus on income disparity is merely a fad. But no less than the champions of globalization represented by the World Economic Forum in 2013 listed inequality in the United States as a threat to its security:

The incredible wealth created in the last decade in the US has gone to a smaller and smaller portion of the population, and the disparity stems from many of the same roots as in developing nations (2013: 10).

If inequality is as much a danger to the West as it is to the developing world shouldn't that shared concern be a starting point for a worldwide conversation regarding the threat it poses to security everywhere? If market forces alone won't necessarily result in a level playing field, and the absence of that fosters instability, shouldn't poverty reduction and closing the wealth gap be primary goals for the development practitioner? From the Oxfam report it appears than an ever-growing number of taxpayers in the West are beginning to vocalize outrage in regards to their growing economic distance from the elite. Perhaps the creation of some new buzzwords might be in order.

Conclusion

A development program is too often measured by targets set in the boardrooms of an Alpha global city than in partnership with the various actors whose lives are the focus of the project itself. The buzzwords spoken in those meeting rooms are often delivered to an executive audience lacking diversity or any real connection to the population being focused on (El Toms, 2013). Hopefully the idea of the hiring a "new type" of consultant – local, invested, internal – to guide development design and implementation will catch on. Forward-thinking organizations are seeing the absolute necessity of inclusiveness that goes beyond the proposal submission stage (Pasquini, 2013).

What is launched, when there is no real partnership with the "client" (though the project may be enveloped in right-sounding terms such as "people centered development") is nothing if not "new imperialism" (Duffield 2001: 32). Imperialism does not require a development-security nexus. In its latest iteration, if the board and the organization it oversees are satisfied with clearly-identified benchmarks, targets, and a monitoring and evaluation plan – no matter how inappropriate it may be when applied in a in a particular community – the project can, in theory, be measured. With the above in place, development can be proven, projects can continue to be funded, and all is well. Organizational security has been achieved. Actual security in the communities where development programs are

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implemented is not necessary, it would appear, in the development business.

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