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Development Studies (University of South Africa)



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DVA1501**Introduction to Development Studies 100 Marks**

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SECTION A: ESSAY-TYPE QUESTION

QUESTION 01

The Evolution of Thought in Human-Centered Development

Introduction

Development, initially perceived through an economic lens, has witnessed a profound evolution in understanding. It was once synonymous with economic growth but has progressively come to encompass a broader range of dimensions and concerns. This essay aims to explore the transformation of thought in human-centered development, highlighting the recognition of its multidimensional nature beyond economics and the integration of human well-being as a central objective.

Early Economic Paradigm of Development

During the early stages of development thinking, the predominant view centered around economic considerations. Development was narrowly equated with economic progress, often measured by gross domestic product (GDP) and industrialization. Scholars and policymakers emphasized the importance of modernization and economic growth as the primary means to achieve development (Smith, 1998). This economic-centric approach largely ignored the social and environmental dimensions of development. Critiques of the economic-centric approach began to emerge, questioning the narrow focus on economic indicators and advocating for a more comprehensive understanding of development. Critics argued that a singular emphasis on economic growth failed to address the persistent challenges of poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation (Sen, 1999). It became evident that a more holistic approach was needed to account for the diverse aspects of human well-being.

Expanding the Development Paradigm

The expansion of the development paradigm involved a shift towards incorporating social, environmental, and participatory dimensions. This broadened perspective aimed to address the limitations of the earlier economic-centric approach and provide a more nuanced understanding of development. Social development and human rights gained prominence as integral components of human-centered development. Scholars began to recognize that development should not be limited to economic factors alone but should also encompass social well-being. Social indicators such as education, healthcare, and access to basic services were included in the evaluation of development (UNDP, 2020). Moreover, the concept of human rights gained traction, highlighting the importance of protecting and promoting the fundamental rights of individuals in the pursuit of development (Alkire, 2005). Sustainable development emerged as a critical aspect of human-centered development. It acknowledged the interdependence between economic, social, and environmental dimensions. Sustainable development called for the integration of environmental considerations into development frameworks, emphasizing the need for responsible resource management and the preservation of ecosystems for present and future generations (WCED, 1987). This shift recognized the intrinsic link between human well-being and the health of the natural environment.

Participatory development and empowerment became crucial in human-centered development approaches. The notion that development should be a participatory and inclusive process gained traction. Participatory development aimed to involve communities and marginalized groups in decision-making processes, ensuring their active participation in shaping their own development (Chamber). Empowerment of individuals and communities, particularly those marginalized and disadvantaged, became central to achieving sustainable and equitable development (Narayan, 2005).

Human-Centered Development: A Holistic Approach

The culmination of these shifts in development thinking gave rise to the concept of human-centered development, which considers the well-being and agency of individuals as the core of development efforts. The Human Development Index (HDI)

(2021), introduced by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), emerged as a key tool in measuring development beyond economic growth. The HDI incorporates indicators such as life expectancy, education, and income to assess human well-being (2021). This broader perspective recognizes that development should not solely focus on economic outputs but should also prioritize enhancing people's capabilities and opportunities to lead fulfilling lives (Sen, 1999). Amartya Sen's capability approach further deepened the understanding of human-centered development. The capability approach emphasizes that development should be evaluated based on people's capabilities and freedoms to pursue a life they value (DVA 2021). It recognizes that development is not merely about income or material possessions but about expanding the range of choices available to individuals, enabling them to live lives of dignity and fulfillment.

Critiques of Human-Centered Development

While human-centered development has made significant progress in broadening the understanding of development, it is not without its critiques. Several scholars have raised concerns and offered alternative perspectives to challenge the dominant human-centered approach.

Post-Development Critiques

Post-development theorists argue that the concept of development itself is flawed and rooted in Western-centric notions of progress and modernity. They argue that the pursuit of development often perpetuates existing power structures, reinforces inequality, and undermines local cultures and ways of life (Escobar, 1995). Post-development theorists advocate for embracing diverse forms of knowledge and alternative models of development that prioritize self-determination and autonomy of communities.

Feminist Perspectives

Feminist scholars have critiqued human-centered development for its failure to adequately address gender inequalities and the specific challenges faced by women.

They argue that development policies and practices often neglect the gendered dimensions of poverty, education, health, and participation (Moser, 1993). Feminist perspectives emphasize the importance of gender mainstreaming and empowering women as essential components of development.

Contemporary Approaches to Human-Centered Development

As the understanding of development continues to evolve, contemporary approaches have emerged to address the limitations and critiques of the traditional human-centered development paradigm. These approaches strive to incorporate a more comprehensive understanding of development, accounting for diverse dimensions and perspectives.

A. Well-being and Happiness

One such approach is the focus on well-being and happiness as central objectives of development. Scholars and policymakers have recognized that development should not be solely measured by economic indicators but should also prioritize the overall well-being and happiness of individuals and communities (Helliwell et al., 2020). This approach takes into account subjective well-being, quality of life, and social cohesion, alongside economic considerations.

c. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals by the United Nations in 2015 marked a significant shift towards a more holistic and integrated approach to development. The SDGs encompass 17 interconnected goals that address a range of social, economic, and environmental challenges, such as poverty eradication, gender equality, clean energy, and climate action (UN, 2015). The SDGs emphasize the need for a balanced and inclusive approach to development that leaves no one behind.

C. Human-Centered Design and Innovation

Human-centered design and innovation have gained prominence in development practices. This approach emphasizes understanding the needs, aspirations, and contexts of individuals and communities in the design and implementation of development interventions. It prioritizes user-centered approaches and participatory processes to ensure that solutions are relevant, sustainable, and impactful (IDEO.org, 2021).

Conclusion

The evolution of thought in human-centered development has transformed our understanding of development beyond a narrow economic paradigm. From the early economic-centric perspective, development has expanded to encompass social, environmental, and participatory dimensions. The recognition of human well-being, social inclusion, environmental sustainability, and empowerment as central objectives has shaped contemporary approaches to development. However, the concept of human-centered development is not without its critiques. Post-development theorists challenge the very notion of development, while feminist perspectives highlight the need for gender-sensitive approaches. Nonetheless, contemporary approaches such as well-being and happiness, the Sustainable Development Goals, and human-centered design provide avenues for a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of development. Ultimately, the evolution of thought in human-centered development reflects an ongoing endeavor to create a more just, equitable, and sustainable world. It reminds us of the importance of constantly questioning and redefining our understanding of development to address the complex challenges faced by societies and promote the well-being and dignity of all individuals and communities.

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SECTION B:**1. 1. Discuss THREE (3) negative consequences of deforestation**

- **Loss of Biodiversity:** Deforestation leads to the destruction and fragmentation of natural habitats, resulting in the loss of numerous plant and animal species. Forests are home to a vast array of flora and fauna, many of which are endemic and have adapted to specific forest ecosystems. When forests are cleared, species lose their habitats, leading to population declines and, in some cases, even extinction. The loss of biodiversity disrupts the delicate balance of ecosystems and can have far-reaching ecological implications.
- **Climate Change:** Forests play a crucial role in regulating the Earth's climate by absorbing carbon dioxide (CO₂) through photosynthesis and storing it in trees and vegetation. Deforestation releases large amounts of stored carbon back into the atmosphere, contributing to greenhouse gas emissions and exacerbating climate change. It is estimated that deforestation accounts for around 10% of global greenhouse gas emissions, making it a significant driver of climate change.
- **Soil Degradation and Loss:** Forests play a crucial role in maintaining soil fertility and preventing erosion. The removal of trees through deforestation exposes the soil to erosion by wind and water, leading to the loss of topsoil and nutrient depletion. Without the protective canopy of trees, rainfall erodes the soil, washing away essential nutrients and leaving behind barren and infertile land.

2. Define and explain the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Gross National Product (GNP) as indicators of development. In your discussion, also include their strengths and weaknesses.

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Gross National Product (GNP) are two economic indicators used to gauge a country's level of development and economic performance. GDP represents the total monetary value of all final goods and services produced within a country's borders during a specific period. It is a widely used indicator that allows for international comparisons and provides insights into

economic growth. However,(2021) GDP has limitations. It focuses solely on economic output and neglects important aspects of development, such as income distribution, social well-being, and environmental sustainability. GDP also fails to account for non-market activities and environmental externalities, which are critical factors for sustainable development(1999).

On the other hand, GNP takes into account the income earned by a country's residents, both domestically and abroad(2015). It provides a broader perspective by including income generated overseas, such as through investments or remittances. This broader approach captures the contribution of a country's citizens to economic activities, regardless of their geographical location. However, GNP shares many of the limitations of GDP. It can be distorted by international flows and does not fully consider income distribution within a country.

Both GDP and GNP have strengths and weaknesses. They provide valuable information about an economy's production and income, allowing for comparisons across countries and tracking economic growth. However, their narrow focus on economic measures means they do not capture the full complexity of development. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of development, it is crucial to complement these indicators with measures that capture aspects like income distribution, social well-being, and environmental sustainability. By considering a broader range of factors, policymakers can adopt a more holistic approach to promote sustainable and inclusive development.

3.Discuss how the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to poverty and inequality.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had far-reaching effects on poverty and inequality, amplifying existing disparities and creating new challenges. One of the most significant contributors to poverty has been the economic contraction caused by the pandemic. Lockdowns and restrictions led to widespread business closures and job losses, disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations and pushing many into poverty. Low-income earners, informal workers, and those in precarious employment were particularly vulnerable to income loss and unemployment.

The pandemic also disrupted education systems, leading to school closures and a transition to remote learning. However, this shift highlighted the digital divide and unequal access to resources. Children from low-income communities faced significant challenges in accessing remote learning tools, exacerbating educational inequalities. The disruption in education has the potential to have long-term consequences, widening the gap in educational outcomes and perpetuating existing disparities.

Healthcare inequalities have been magnified during the pandemic, as marginalized communities faced barriers in accessing healthcare services. Limited access to healthcare facilities, lack of health insurance, and systemic inequalities in healthcare provision have resulted in disproportionate health outcomes. Vulnerable populations, including low-income individuals and marginalized groups, have experienced higher infection rates and poorer health outcomes compared to more privileged counterparts. The pandemic has underscored the urgent need to address healthcare disparities and ensure equitable access to healthcare services for all.

Gender inequalities have also been exacerbated by the pandemic. Women have been disproportionately affected, facing increased caregiving responsibilities as schools and childcare facilities closed or operated at limited capacity. The burden of unpaid care work fell disproportionately on women, affecting their employment prospects and economic independence. Women also faced increased risks of gender-based violence during periods of lockdown and limited mobility. The pandemic has highlighted the need to address systemic gender inequalities and ensure that women have equal opportunities and support during times of crisis.

4. Define and explain the concept of sustainable development, and briefly discuss its three pillars

Sustainable development is a holistic approach to development that seeks to meet the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It recognizes the interconnectedness of social, economic, and environmental dimensions and strives for a balanced and inclusive approach to progress.

The concept of sustainable development is based on three pillars: social, economic, and environmental. The social pillar emphasizes the well-being, equity, and inclusiveness of societies. It recognizes that development should prioritize the improvement of human welfare, including access to education, healthcare, and basic services for all individuals. Social sustainability also entails promoting social cohesion, reducing inequalities, and fostering inclusive governance and participation.

The economic pillar focuses on the long-term viability of economic systems and the importance of sustainable economic growth. It emphasizes the need to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation by promoting resource efficiency, innovation, and responsible consumption and production patterns. Sustainable economic development involves creating opportunities for decent work and economic empowerment while ensuring equitable distribution of wealth and benefits.

The environmental pillar recognizes the importance of environmental conservation and protection. It emphasizes the need to preserve natural resources, mitigate climate change, and safeguard ecosystems and biodiversity. Sustainable development requires adopting sustainable practices, such as transitioning to renewable energy sources, promoting sustainable agriculture, and implementing effective waste management and pollution control measures. It also entails considering the environmental impact of development projects and adopting strategies that minimize ecological harm.

These three pillars of sustainable development are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Social progress is closely linked to economic development, as inclusive and sustainable economic growth can contribute to poverty reduction and improve living standards. Environmental sustainability is essential for maintaining ecosystem services, which are crucial for human well-being and economic activities. By addressing all three pillars, sustainable development aims to create a harmonious and balanced approach to development that ensures the well-being of present and future generations while preserving the planet's resources for future use.

Academic honesty declaration

Declaration

1. I understand what academic dishonesty entails and am aware of Unisa's policies in this regard.
2. I declare that this portfolio is my own, original work. Where I have used someone else's work, I have indicated this by using the prescribed style of referencing. Every contribution to, and quotation in, this assignment from the work or works of other people has been referenced according to this style.
3. I have not allowed and will not allow anyone to copy my work with the intention of passing it off as his or her own work.
4. I did not make use of another student's work and submitted it as my own.
5. I am aware that marks can be deducted for poor/no referencing in this examination.

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