

Fourth International Islamic Economics Seminar: Inaugural Address

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During the past three decades, development has been perceived both as a goal itself and as a means towards achieving certain goals. In many Third World countries, development has even become a form of ideology. To achieve it, numerous theories and strategies have been presented. Many of these approaches have been experimented with in a practical manner. In general, however, returns and benefits have been negligible. Although modernized sectors have appeared in most Third World countries, along with social classes and lifestyles similar to those of the West, the majority of the population's economic and social standard of living has deteriorated. Many basic human and political rights have even been stripped away in the name of achieving development. In many instances, development has become nothing more than a slogan and a means for despotic regimes to solidify their grip on their unfortunate populations.

Perhaps the same factors contributing to the Third World's paralysis contribute to the West's success and achievement. One group of related factors is the concept of development, its ideology and strategy. When we analyze this issue, we find that the historical advances in western society since the Industrial Revolution, and its associated social and cultural movements, did not follow a predetermined written strategy or various five- and ten-year plans. Rather, this development followed a more spontaneous course determined by the changing circumstances of time, place, culture, and individual effort. As a result of the accumulation of such experiences, procedures, and know-how, development was achieved.

When development was defined as a goal for the Third World, ready-made western procedures, theories, and strategies were adopted without regard to the fact that these procedures were not actually implemented in the West but rather came about as a result of a long period of trial and error. In the Third World, however, they are implemented beforehand and thus redefine what the Third World will look like socially, culturally, and intellectually.

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Such superficial approach, with all of its related elements, is a key factor in the failure of Third World development. Development, in its concept and philosophical essence, is self-growth coming from within—similar to the growth of human, animal, and plant life. Such growth comes without any outside influence to predetermine the shape and form of society. Growth of this type constitutes a freeing of internal energies and an explosion of initiative from within. Obstacles and problems are tackled through the motivation of society at large. Such motivation results in a group effort directed at achieving those certain goals that coincide with a society's culture and philosophy of existence. The methodology used would be one derived from experiences that are harmonious with the prevailing ideology.

Transplanting alien ideologies and strategies in their entirety for the purpose of reshaping and redefining societies with ancient civilizations and established cultural patterns not only violates an individual's rights, self-concept, and identity, but also creates a struggle that depletes his/her energy and capacity to produce. Those who push for the ideology of development consider traditional Third World culture to be backward and restraining and maintain that it must be replaced with a modern imported culture. Others, trying to uphold traditional ways, find in imported methods a subtle campaign by colonial powers to undermine local society through corruption and dependency in order to fulfill imperialist interests.

Hence the concept and strategy of development that guides change in the Third World must be fully compatible with a society's inherent culture and personality. Only then can the energy of individuals, who are both the goal and means to achieve the goal, be harnessed towards development, and only then can individuals be motivated to take an active role in the effort that will bring about their self-actualization. This is what the contemporary ideology of development has failed to accomplish.

Additionally, every developmental strategy that has been proposed stresses the importance of capital and of giving priority to the establishment an open market. This is in spite of the fact that many of these societies are characterized by a scarcity of money and wealth and dependency on the outside for even basic food needs. In truth, the first priority of any developmental strategy in such places should be that of utilizing the existing enormous work force and not the development of capital. Those in charge of the development programs should aim at increasing agricultural production so that self-sufficiency can be achieved, rather than concerning themselves with plans that do not make use of the energy of Third World populations. Third World workers should not be driven to provide cheap labor for western factories. Such arrangements take advantage of cheap labor to produce products for the West and impart upon local populations the diseases and problems of such an environment.

In the past, Third World economic and political researchers played a large role for the West within their own communities, for their efforts and thoughts aimed at creating a western society in the Third World with no regard for cultural and historical differences between the two societies. As a result of this ignoring of reality, such misguided efforts and theories bore no fruit. And now, after three decades or more of failed efforts, it is the responsibility of those Third World experts who are sincere to strive towards the development of scientific strategies for the upliftment of their people. Such strategies should aim at development from within and utilize the energy of the people to achieve and fulfill local needs and purposes. They should also take into account local values and produce a diversity in culture, politics, and society competitive with other cultures. An approach of this sort would free Third World populations from technological dependency and international capitalism.

Such a task requires the contribution of all those who are sincere, who belong to the poorer classes of their communities, and who strive towards achieving a real revival as opposed to one that seeks to create large sectors affiliated with the West. Such sincere efforts would alleviate the burdens of international financial institutions and establish development based on the work force and internal energy to meet local needs as an alternative to development based solely on capital.