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What is International Development?

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Introduction

It is a pleasure to be with you today. I took over the volunteer role of chair of the UWC International Board on January 1st and this is my first engagement in that capacity. It is especially appropriate that it brings me to Pearson College because it was right here, in 1988, that I had my first contact with both the International Baccalaureate and the UWC network.

At the time I was president of Laurentian University in Ontario and we had started a year-abroad programme on the Cote d'Azur, called the *Université canadienne en France*. I had been to come and speak about it to Pearson students who might one day be interested in this experience.

I was travelling with my 16-year-old daughter Catherine. While I was speaking to some of the students, the Head, Tony Macoun, detailed others to take her out to Race Rocks. She came back with stars in her eyes, declared her eagerness to attend a UWC, and started at the UWC of the American West less than a year later.

Not long afterwards I was invited to join the Council of Foundation of the International Baccalaureate, which is its governing body, and served as a member for almost ten years. Meanwhile Catherine, after training as a biologist/ecologist and working for a period as an inspector of mines in British Columbia, is now teaching at a school in Vancouver where she has introduced the International Baccalaureate's Middle Years Programme.

I mention all this to point out that a contact with a United World College tends to lead onto deeper involvement in international movements.

An International School

You are studying at a school that is international in three ways. First, your student body is drawn from all over the world so you are all gaining something of an international outlook even without trying – and becoming more aware of the particularities of your own countries and regions at the same time.

Second, you are studying the International Baccalaureate, which adds two more dimensions. The obvious one is that the IB Diploma was designed to be acceptable by

universities internationally. The design was clearly successful, because universities compete to recruit students with IB diplomas.

The less obvious dimension is that the IB attempts to give you a more international perspective than you would gain by taking any particular national curriculum. So I expect that most of you are interested in international matters and even somewhat idealistic about internationalism.

I was interested to learn, for example, about the conference on Perspectives on Global Citizenship that you are holding later this month. It's an interesting title.

A purist would say that there is no such thing as global citizenship – you can only be the citizen of a country that can issue you a passport. I once had a nice red version of this UN Laissez Passer, but that didn't make me a global citizen because it isn't a passport and there was no world government that I could appeal to if a country mistreated me. I guess you will be debating all that!

International Development Agencies

I am going to talk to you about international development. My own university work involved 40 years of study, teaching and leadership in Britain, France, Canada and the US, with 17 years as a university president in Canada and the UK. But in my remarks today I shall draw particularly on the last 12 years of my career when I worked in the thick of international development, first as head of Education at UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, based in Paris, and then as head of the Commonwealth of Learning, which is based in Vancouver. I am not going to describe these organisations except to say that they are both similar and different.

They are similar because both are what are known as multi-lateral intergovernmental organisations. UNESCO represents and is funded by nearly all the world's governments, while the Commonwealth of Learning, or COL, works for the 54 governments of the Commonwealth.

They are different because UNESCO has a broad mandate in Education, Science and Culture, focussing particularly on advising governments about policy in these areas. COL has a much narrower mandate, which is to help developing countries use technology to expand and improve education. For that reason it tends to intervene much more at the grassroots level than UNESCO does.

However, both organisations are engaged in international development, which is what I want to talk about with you. I shall begin by exploring what we mean by development. Then I shall talk in more detail about development in the area of education before ending with some remarks about how the world of international development is changing.

Understanding development

Let's look at this word 'development'. People used to talk about developed and less-developed countries, later they talked about developed and developing countries. The march of euphemism continues and today we usually speak about emerging nations or, if you are of a capitalist turn of mind, about emerging markets.

I shall stick with the terms developed and less developed. What do we mean when we say one country is more developed than another? I am sure you could all jot down several words that you would use to make the distinction. Wealth is an obvious one. Richer countries also often do better on some of the other criteria for development that you might use, such as the level of education, the quality of infrastructure, the health of the people, the amount of garbage lying around.

But not everything correlates with wealth. The Cubans live slightly longer than Americans – and the average Cuban probably has more effective health care – even though the US is much richer. People in Bangladesh live longer than those in India, although India is richer.

Development as Freedom

We owe the best way of thinking about development to the Indian thinker and Nobel laureate Amartya Sen. He conceives development as freedom. For Sen development is a process of enhancing the freedoms that people can enjoy.

Freedoms 'from' and Freedoms 'to'.

Freedom comes in various forms and one simple distinction is between 'freedom from' and 'freedom to'.

Freedom from hunger; freedom from poverty; freedom from disease; freedom from pollution: all these are basic freedoms, which most people seek before they concern themselves with the 'freedoms to'.

Those freedoms are numerous: the freedom to choose how you will be governed; the freedom to express yourself; the freedom to practise religion – or not; the freedom to get an education; the freedom to be treated equally before the law.

These, like other freedoms, are often relative.

For example, when Ghana celebrated its independence in 1957 Richard Nixon, then US Vice-President, was sent to represent the US. The story goes that he sauntered up to a couple of black journalists and asked them, 'so how does it feel to be free?' We wouldn't know, we are from Alabama', came the reply.

There are also potential conflicts between some of the 'freedoms from' and the 'freedoms to'. The developed country where these are most obvious is the United States, where the freedom to wander the streets armed like an infantry soldier is considered more important than the freedom from being shot in your school or street by some heavily armed nutcase.

Similarly many Americans consider that the freedom to give the finger to their government when it proposes a collective solution to a social problem is more important than the freedom from worry about sickness that universal health care can provide – as it was provided in Canada under the leadership of the Prime Minister for whom your college is named.

Some other countries are the other way round. In their heyday communist countries were much stronger on providing ‘freedoms from’ than ‘freedoms to’, whatever their written constitutions said. But this is a talk about international development, not political theory, so let me explain why Amartya Sen equates development with freedom.

His double point is that freedom is not only the primary purpose of development but also the primary means for its achievement.

First, this means that we measure the progress of development by the expansion of the real freedoms the people can enjoy.

But second, as he puts it, ‘the achievement of development is thoroughly dependent on the free agency of people’. People who are free are more committed to the development of their families, their communities and their countries than people who are not. And they are more effective at achieving it.

International Development Agencies

The basic premise of international development is that a less-developed country can be helped in its development by the actions of international organisations and other countries. The United Nations Development Programme, the World Health Organisation and the Food and Agriculture Organisation exist for this purpose, as does the Canadian International Development Agency, to take the example of your host country.

Historically such programmes and agencies concentrated their work on improving the ‘freedoms from’ but they also sought to enhance the ‘freedoms to’ by nudging developing countries in the direction of more democracy and greater respect for human rights. This was particularly true in the 1990s after the Cold War ended.

During the Cold War the West was so keen to get countries on its side that it was soft on some very nasty regimes. Franklin D. Roosevelt once said of Somoza, the dictator of Nicaragua that "He's a son-of-a-bitch, but he's our son-of-a-bitch" and another US president spoke similarly of Mobutu the Congolese dictator: “He’s a bastard, but he is our bastard”.

In the 1990s aid donors became more upfront about promoting freedom – helped by growing evidence that democracy does help development. For example, Sen himself pointed out that because of its strong emphasis on women’s education the birth rate in the state of Kerala in democratic India fell faster than it did in China with its coercive top-down one-child policy.

The Millennium Development Goals

The most important example of an international commitment to development in your lifetimes occurred in 2000 when the largest-ever gathering of heads of government at the UN agreed to set the Millennium Development Goals.

There are eight goals and they are a mixture of ‘freedoms from’ such as the freedoms from hunger, poverty and high infant and maternal mortality; and the ‘freedoms to’ such as the freedom of girls to go to school.

I shall not go through them in detail because I want to concentrate on the education goals, but simply ask you to note that the target set in 2000 for attaining these goals was 2015, so you will hear a lot about them in the next two years as people argue about the extent to which they have been achieved.

In the Millennium Year another important meeting was held in Dakar, Senegal – The World Forum on Education for All.

The Campaign for Education for All

Its purpose was to reinforce a campaign that began with the world conference on education for all that convened in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990. It was convened because in 1985 some 105 million children aged between six and eleven were not in school, the majority of them girls. Forecasts suggested that the number of out-of-school children might double to 200 million by 2000.

At Jomtien 155 governments and a bevy of international organisations and NGOs committed themselves to a set of targets covering education at various levels.

However, on the primary indicator of children in school, Jomtien was a failure because a decade later the number of children out of school had grown to 125 million. There were various reasons for this, which I won’t go into – the 1990s were a pretty turbulent decade and not just because most of you were born then!

In 2000 the international community decided to hit the nail harder and convened another World Forum on Education for All in Dakar in 2000. The Forum again came up with a set of targets but this time put more effective mechanisms in place for supporting countries that wanted to make progress.

One of these was the Fast-Track Initiative, a scheme through which a small number of donor countries invested substantial funds to help countries that seemed to be both committed and well organised to make progress in achieving Universal Primary Education. As a result of this, and to cut a long story short, much faster progress has been made towards Universal Primary Education since 2000. We are not there yet, but large countries like India and Bangladesh are making big strides. Nigeria and Pakistan represent the biggest remaining challenges.

These figures are the background to a book that I published two years ago, *Mega-Schools, Technology and Teachers: Achieving Education for All*. The book examines the consequences of the success and the failure of the campaign for Universal Primary Education.

The success is that enrolment rates have increased significantly. The growth in the numbers in school represented a tremendous input of resources and effort by developing countries. The flip side is the failure. Many children are still not in school.

This is the starting point for my book, which addressed both the challenge of success and the challenge of failure. The challenge of success is the secondary surge. Success in expanding primary education is sending a tsunami of children towards secondary education – but millions of them have nowhere to go. The challenge of failure is the need to train more teachers.

Part of the book is about expanding secondary education. The other part is about expanding teacher education. I shall focus today on secondary education.

The Secondary Surge

My first point is that the numbers are very considerable. Up to 400 million secondary-age children from 12 to 17 are not in school. Of course some, like you and like these here are well catered for.

But others are not so lucky.

I take some space in the book to argue for the importance of secondary education but the only argument I shall use today is that it is the best medium-term weapon against climate change. That is because the most powerful driver of climate change is increasing population.

Since the industrial revolution the world population has grown by a factor of seven and each human being today, on average, makes seven times greater demands on the earth's resources. That's a fifty-fold increase in two centuries. Slowing population growth is one way of limiting that demand. Women with secondary education have, on average, 1.5 fewer children than those without. A difference of one child per woman means 3 billion more or fewer people on the planet by 2050. Secondary education for girls must be a priority.

The Imperative of Expanding Secondary Education

Expanding secondary education is – or soon will be – the key priority for many developing countries.

Yet in a time of economic difficulty countries need to strive for greater efficiency and in many countries secondary education is not at all efficient. Hence, the book stresses the

importance of expanding open schooling, which is the adaptation of distance learning and technology-based learning at pre-university level.

Open schools allow countries to expand access to secondary education rapidly at low cost. Let me give two examples.

India's National Institute for Open Schooling is a huge enterprise with thousands of study centres around the country. It has 1.5 million pupils and admits 400,000 new ones each year. But open schooling is not just a solution for large countries. Namibia is a small country in terms of population – 2 million people – but its open school, NAMCOL, accounts for 40% of all secondary enrolments.

However, I do not propose the creation and expansion of open schools as a separate and distinct element within national school systems simply to mop up excess demand. Open schools should be seen as catalysts for integrating all elements of schooling into an educational ecosystem fit for the 21st century.

The key point is that it will not be possible to accommodate the secondary surge through the conventional provision of secondary schooling, skills training and adult education. Governments must encourage alternative approaches and foster providers that can deliver quality learning at scale with low costs.

As well as extending conventional public school systems, governments should encourage the expansion of private schooling for the poor, draw lessons from projects involving information and communications technology, and give special priority to expanding open schooling.

Developing and expanding open schooling are particularly promising alternatives that can also be integrated with other approaches to make them more cost-effective and cost-efficient. An integrated approach also holds the promise of providing education that is better adapted to the needs of the 21st century.

It can blur the increasingly unhelpful distinction between formal and non-formal education; build a bridge between knowledge acquisition and skills development; and has the potential to reduce the inequalities of access that blight conventional provision in most countries. Very importantly, open schooling is less expensive than conventional schooling and the differential is increasing.

The expansion of conventional public schooling at the secondary level faces major challenges of both cost and effectiveness in developing countries.

Professor Keith Lewin's research shows that if the unit costs of education at secondary level are more than double those at primary level, a country will never achieve universal secondary education. Most developed countries do have a cost ratio of less than 2 to 1. But in most developing countries the difference is far greater than that, ranging from factors of 3 to 1, 6 to 1, and even beyond in most African countries.

Moreover, despite this expenditure, in some countries public sector schooling is losing credibility – and often pupils – as parents choose alternatives to schools plagued by decrepit facilities, uncommitted or absent teachers and a general lack of accountability.

Computers and Children

Many assume that information and communications technologies can expand quality education cost-effectively. So in my book I looked at two major initiatives using computers for education in the developing world: One Laptop per Child and the Hole in the Wall.

They are very different but both projects lead to the conclusion that for computers to enrich and enhance learning at scale, they need to be embedded within the wider school framework.

One Laptop Per Child

My first example is Nicholas Negroponte's One Laptop per Child project - OLPC.

OLPC was Negroponte's very personal project. He believes that if children can learn the very skill of learning, education will be a force to eliminate global poverty. He wants children in the developing world to 'learn learning' through a methodology called "constructivism" in which the learners construct new knowledge from their experiences.

The MIT Media Lab built the XO-1 laptop to enable constructivist learning in the dusty, hot, un-electrified schools of poor countries. It was intended to be cheap enough to be purchased in massive quantities for one-to-one distribution.

Launched at the 2005 World Economic Forum in Davos, what was called the "\$100 laptop" was an instant international sensation. Developing world presidents attending the Forum were 'captivated by Negroponte's dream that they could revolutionize education with an inexpensive yet rugged laptop, specifically designed for children, which negated the need to construct schools or hire teachers'.

Sadly, with the benefit of hindsight the Davos launch now seems to have been the high point of the project. It has failed to achieve Negroponte's vision in several ways.

First, take up of the XO laptop has fallen far short of Negroponte's ambition to place 150 million annually by 2007. A total of around one million have been distributed to date.

Second, the discourse has shifted. Negroponte used to insist that, as a generative technology to foster constructivist learning, the OLPC initiative was about 'learning not laptops'. But today the project's focus is on selling the XO in a market that is replete with cheap laptops and tablets that make no claim to promote constructivism.

Third, to the chagrin of academics following the project, there is little focus on educational outcomes. There were no plans to measure usage of the laptops, or to

correlate changes in test scores with their use. Instead, the idea was to create a simple and generative infrastructure, stand back, and see what happened.

We cannot know whether, with better organisation and planning, the OLPC would have confirmed Negroponte's hypothesis on a global scale.

The Hole in the Wall

The second project is India's Hole-in-the-Wall experiment. Its initiator, Sugata Mitra, is now known affectionately as the 'slumdog professor' because the HITW project inspired the novel that led to the Oscar-winning film *Slumdog Millionaire*.

Mitra intentionally put computers in public places rather than schools, with interesting results. He began over a decade ago with a single computer embedded in the brick wall of a playground next to a Delhi slum. The results surprised everyone: 'Slum children were able to use the computer to browse, play games, create documents and paint pictures within a few days'. The press called the experiment the "Hole in the Wall" while researchers called it "Minimally Invasive Education" – a euphemism for dispensing with teachers!

Realising that he had a tiger by the tail, Mitra initiated a research programme. It focused first on observing the behaviour of the children, then on examining what they were learning and finally the impact on their performance in school.

The most fundamental finding is that learning happens in groups. Negroponte held that every child must have a laptop, whereas Mitra has found that having numbers of children working on the same computer is the key to success as well as being less expensive.

Learning at the HITW occurs in stages. The starting point is intense excitement. All children reported that they liked working with computers, using the words 'fun, enjoyment, pleasure, and feeling good'. But getting started is a challenge: 'during the first week the computer hangs because all the children are pressing on the keyboard simultaneously. But gradually a fluid and flexible group emerges that operates on the computer and learns through... trial and error'.

Membership of the group changes constantly, which has the effect of making each child both a learner and a teacher at different times. The gap between experts and learners disappears because all participants are considered experts in some capacity. It is the sharing of knowledge by everyone that drives evolutionary development and continuous progress. Children prefer to learn from their peer group because peers represent a more helpful and attainable competence model than adults or teachers.

What is the impact on the wider learning agenda? Is HITW an option for expanding schooling at low cost? Obviously children can use computers to learn about computing, but what about other subjects?

Research indicates that involvement in the HITW does develop intellectual maturity, although without improving the capacity for rote learning favoured by Indian schools. It also shows that communities believe that HITW computers are good for children – an important finding given that parents are usually sceptical about educational technology. Another significant result is that out-of-school children benefit from the HITW.

Where does this leave us? First, I do think that schools and governments are learning the lesson that the successful use of computer in education means embedding the technology in the school system, not treating it as something revolutionary and distinct.

Second, technology marches on and I sense that, with our familiarity with laptops and smart phones in the developed world, we have not yet appreciated the impact that cheap tablets costing less than \$50 are having in the developing world. This is the space to watch. Technology by itself will never solve educational problems, but when the technology is cheap, flexible and easy to use, it helps.

Those are my thoughts about international development as it applies to education.

Are you interested?

If you are looking to work in this field in a gap year or later, then I suggest that expanding secondary education by every possible means is the world's biggest development challenge. Solve that and you will be a long way towards achieving the other Millennium Development Goals.

But today, applying to work for the UNDP or your own national agency for international development may not be the best way of doing that. Let me end with some comments about the changing politics of international development.

With hindsight it seems that the years following the turn of the millennium were the high water mark for the impact of international development agencies. Ministers of international development in key donor countries such as the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the UK – all women as it happened – made a tremendous contribution to campaign for Universal Primary Education.

Since then various developments have muddied the waters.

At a time of domestic economic difficulties many electorates are becoming skeptical – or actively hostile – to spending money on international aid. 42 years ago at the UN General Assembly it was agreed that countries would aim to spend 0.7% of their Gross Domestic Product on international aid. That sounds good but there are several problems.

First, only five countries have achieved that target: Denmark, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway and Sweden.

Second, many countries are less than half way to the target: Australia – 0.25; Canada – 0.34; Japan – 0.28; USA 0.22. Ironically the public in these countries seems to think that

that their national aid budget is huge, whereas in fact it is very small. A more recent problem is that the countries involved in the war in Afghanistan have diverted a lot of their aid budget to support nation building there, leaving even less for the Millennium Development Goals generally.

Third, new players are emerging. China now gives large sums of money to African countries without any accompanying sermons on human rights. India, while still the recipient of international aid, has started giving out international aid itself.

Fourth, and most importantly, the funds channeled through governments are a decreasingly important source of funds. As economies pick up in Africa, so is private sector investment. It is fashionable to say that the commercial sector can provide services to people more efficiently and effectively than governments. There are many examples of private schools serving the poorest communities in the world. If you really want to get involved in development and fancy yourself as an entrepreneur, go and create a private school in a poor community in Africa or Asia.

Before you do, read a fascinating book, *The Beautiful Tree*, by James Tooley, a controversial figure who re-discovered the role of private education in poor communities and has put his money where his mouth is by moving to India to set up a network of such schools. His subtitle is: “A personal journey into how the world’s poorest people are educating themselves”. It is both an inspiring story and a scathing critique of much international development work.

Rather than draw tidy conclusions I shall leave it there and take your questions and comments. International development is an ever-changing scene and if you choose this as your life I am certain that your experience will be very different from mine.