

THE ROLE OF NGOS IN THE PROCESS OF EMPOWERMENT AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

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ABSTRACT

To date, two general bi-polar models, or approaches to disability have been popularly advanced within the literature, namely, the medical and social models of disability. Within each model, there is a significant degree of variation with respect to where emphasis has been placed. Both models provide pertinent insights into how disability has been conceptualised, but neither model provides an adequate, comprehensive explanation of the phenomenon, with each partially reflecting the “reality” of disability. Both models are deficient in their explanation of how marginalised and often oppressed groups, such as disabled people, are able to recognise their potential to change their present situation, thereby becoming full and active citizens in the contemporary societies in which they live. Both the medical and social models are themselves based on philosophical assumptions about the understandings of human nature, the process of social change and development, and how individuals within any given society are able to function. Both models perceive disabled people as being passive subjects. This chapter has the following objectives. First, to provide an analysis and critique of the medical and social models of disability, and provide some tentative suggestions for the development of another model, which attempts to combine the positive elements of the two previous models. Secondly, to consider the role that non-governmental organisations have and can potentially play in the participation, empowerment and social transformation of poor and marginalised group, with particular reference to disabled people. This chapter focuses on the theories of empowerment and social transformation as espoused by the Brazilian educationalist, Paulo Friere.

INTRODUCTION

The past three decades have witnessed the emergence of the area of Disability Studies, whose intellectual heritage is based on the generic academic disciplines of medical science, psychology, political theory and sociology. The fundamental *raison d'être* of Disability Studies has been to provide a theoretical explanation of how disability can be understood, as well as to provide normative principles upon which the operational practices for the provision of disability services should be based. The post-war era has also witnessed the global development of the “disability movement”. There has been close collaboration between the academic study of disability and those engaged in disability activism.

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THE MEDICAL MODEL

The medical model of disability is considered to be the predecessor of the social model. In this model, disability is defined primarily as a disease state and perceived as a deviation or abstraction from normality. The model asserts that the most significant “problem” that disabled people face is the loss of physical and/or cognitive impairments as well as occupational ability. Hence, the medical model is a deficit model, which views disability as essentially a “problem”, focusing upon the individual physical and/or mental impairments. Such a perspective argues that disability resides within the individual, and that it is reducible to the analysis of impairment. The attainment of “able-bodiedness” is considered as the legitimate criterion by which to measure “normality”. The medical model thus projects able-bodied people as “better” or “superior” than those who have a disability. The model also assumes that disabled people are biologically and psychologically inferior to those who are able-bodied, and by implication, do not have the competence to make decisions for themselves (1). Thirdly, disability is perceived as a personal tragedy, which occurs in individuals on a random basis - it is just a matter of misfortune (2). Furthermore, the medical model of disability assumes that there is an objective state of “normality” which gives professionals, a dominant role. Finklestein has argued that “the aim of returning the individual to the state of normality is the critical foundation upon which the whole rehabilitation machine is constructed” (3). Furthermore, there is little scope for disabled people and their families to participate within this decision-making.

Critique of the Medical Model of Disability

The medical model has been criticised, especially by the disability movement, and found to be deficient on a number of counts. The principal criticism is that the medical model fails to give consideration to the socio-cultural contexts in which impairments are placed, and that disability is essentially a social, not a biological construct. The emphasis placed upon impairments and physiological conditions perpetuate the notion that disabled people are weak and dependent, and that physical incapacity essentially defines the quality of life that a disabled person is able to live. In criticising the model, one does not question the necessity and validity in receiving high quality

medical support, but rather one challenges the nature of social conditions and relationship that are encountered when disabled people and the medical profession interrelate with each other.

THE SOCIAL MODEL

In ideological juxtaposition to the individualistic medical model, the social model of disability provides a socio-political conceptualisation of disability. The social model has arisen in response to the critique of the medical model. The social model is the total antithesis to the medical model, where the primary focus of analysis has shifted from the deficits of the functional, physiological and cognitive abilities of the impaired individual, to the detrimental and oppressive structure of society, and the negative social attitudes encountered by disabled people throughout their life. Harlan Hahn, writing within the North American context, states that disability stems from "the failure of a structured social environment to adjust to the needs and aspirations of citizens with disabilities rather than from the inability of the disabled individual to adapt to the demands of society" (4).

Disability is therefore situated in the wider, external environment, and is not explicable as a consequence of an individual's physical and/or cognitive deficiencies. Thus, in focusing upon the manner in which disability is socially produced, the social model has shifted the debate regarding disability from a bio-medically dominated agenda to one which gives central importance to politics, empowerment, citizenship and choice. Furthermore, disability is the result of society's failure to provide adequate and appropriate services, and the needs of disabled people are not adequately accounted for within the social organisation of society. It is perceived in attitudinal terms as a socio-cultural rather than a biological construct.

A central tenet of the social model is that, irrespective of the political, economic and religious character of the society in which they live, disabled people are subject to oppression and negative social attitudes, that inevitably undermine their person-hood and status of full citizenship. Central to the notion that disabled people are oppressed is the underlying assumption that all societies are characterised by conflict between two competing groups; the dominant and the subordinate.

Finklestein (5) was one of the pioneers in developing a materialist explanation. He postulated that history can be divided into three "distinct and sequential phases", and that within each phase, the manner in which disabled people were socially included or excluded within contemporary society differed. First, the period before the European industrial revolution was characterised by agrarian feudalism and some cottage industries. During this period, there was scant social mobility, where it is maintained that the mode of production did not exclude disabled people from active participation in their local communities. During the second phase, the industrial revolution and its immediate aftermath, disabled people were effectively excluded from being in paid employment, due to the fact that they were not able to maintain the pace set by the factory system. As a consequence, disabled people were separated and socially excluded from mainstream social and economic activity. Finklestein maintains that during the third phase, which is just commencing, disabled people will witness and experience their liberation from social oppression.

The rise of the factory system and the introduction of individual wage-labour, transformed the "means of production", resulting in the separation of home from the workplace, and in the marginalisation of disabled people. Disabled people have become further isolated through the

establishment of closed and segregated institutions, for example, within many so called “special schools” and sheltered training workshops.

A Critique of the Social Model

It is beyond doubt that the genesis and subsequent development of the disability movement, and the theoretical understandings of disability that have thereby ensued, both within the United Kingdom and throughout the world, have brought about a quantum shift in the manner in which disability has been perceived. By purporting that the origins of oppression are located exclusively in “attitudes”, it is difficult to determine their social location, and understand how these in turn result in oppressive action. The model is deficient in failing to analyse the socio-political contexts in which attitudes and values are constructed, and how they are in turn transformed into oppressive actions and practices. Due to strong emphasis being placed upon discriminatory social and political structures, the analysis of what it is to experience impairment within the body, and the sociological and psychological implications in relation to this has largely been ignored. Jenny Morris (6) maintains that the social model has effectively denied the fact that the physical and emotional pain and suffering experienced by disabled people due to their impairments has any impact upon their practical daily living.

A further question arises concerning the appropriateness of the western-based notion of “empowerment”, which presupposes that rights are exercised and that decisions are made in accordance with the preferences and wishes of the individual, in developing countries. Such an individualised notion of empowerment, as espoused by the international disability movement, runs contrary to accepted social customs and practices found within many such countries. In societies such as India, it is customary that all major decisions, for example who one should marry, the purchase of property and career decisions, are taken not by the individual, but collectively through consultation within extended family and kinship networks. This is particularly the case in rural areas, and operates irrespective of whether disability is present within the family. Thus, a focus on rights and decision-making practices rooted in the ideology of individualism is in many societies, particularly those within the African and South-Asian context, are often at variance with established cultural, social norms and practices.

COMBINING THE MEDICAL AND SOCIAL MODELS OF DISABILITY

Given the limitations of both the medical and social models of disability, is it indeed possible to construct another model, that combines the positive features of the previous models? If this is indeed possible, then what would be the constituent elements of such a model?

The different sets of assumptions for both the medical and social models constitute an internally logical and coherent framework, and from this, each derives a coherent set of policy prescription for the operation and development of disability services. However, it is contended that there is a third alternative, that combines the assumptions regarding the nature of social change, development, and human nature. Such a synthesis has at least the potential to provide a new and potentially innovative framework by which to take forward the debate regarding models of disability and consequently, to produce an innovative approach to the provision of disability services.

An individual's human nature, his/her position in society, and life chances are neither exclusively determined by innate biological characteristics and abilities, nor are they totally prescribed by social, economic and political structure of society. Both these approaches assume that all human beings are essentially passive, in the sense that they are unable to influence the course that their life will take. Such a position gives no credence for the creativity that is inherent within all human beings, as well as the indeterminacy within the human condition. However, it is maintained here that human nature and the dynamics of social change are the product of the continuous interactive relationship between an individual's naturally endowed characteristics and the social environment in which he lives, which is itself shaped by social, political and economic factors. There is thus an inter-dependent and dynamic relationship between an individual and his society. Such an approach posits the integration of biological and social factors in determining the human condition in which neither of these two factors are given primacy from an ontological perspective, but they relate to each other interactively.

Secondly, what are the implications, both in terms of the philosophy of development and operational practices, for NGOs adopting a Frierean approach to empowerment and social transformation, notwithstanding the difficulties and obstacles in adopting this approach? Although Frierean theories of social transformation and change have been in existence since the early 1970s (7), and have been adopted in a number of development contexts, they have not been applied within the context of disability service provision. An investigation that attempts to answer both these questions necessitates a consideration of the generic development literature, which deal with the subject of empowerment and participation of disabled people within their local communities.

Despite protestations to the contrary, the claim that CBR is an efficient and effective strategy for the provision of community-based disability services has largely remained unproved. In fact, there has been scant critical evaluation of CBR. Despite there being no one universal agreed definition of CBR, the strategy assumes that the local community will play a pivotal role in service provision, and that the local community is characterised by benevolence, and is viewed as a homogeneous entity. These assumptions regarding the role of the community have been seriously questioned by the work of Catherine Lysack (8). In addition, it is claimed that CBR is multi-sectorial in approach, but in fact many CBR programmes remain largely dominated by the medical profession, and hence strongly influenced by the medical model of disability. In such situations, the role that disabled people play is mostly that of compliance, rather than that of participation. Protagonists of CBR also assume that CBR is cost-effective, but again, this remains to be proved.

Furthermore, it is arguable how many CBR programmes have been ineffective in achieving their goal of empowering disabled people. In relation to this particular point, it is argued within this chapter that it would be appropriate for CBR programmes to adopt and apply a Frierean approach of social transformation, if their aim is the empowerment of disabled people. The debate regarding the meaning of empowerment, what the implications are for the operational practices of NGOs, and the resultant role that should be played within the context of disability service provision, will be further elaborated on in this chapter.

The *raison d'être* of Friere's thesis of social transformation is to ensure that all individuals, particularly those who are subject to oppression are made "more fully human" (7). Friere maintained that all individuals, irrespective of the degree of oppression they have been subjected to, potentially

have the innate ability to transform their political, social and economic situation. However, effective social transformation will only occur when marginalised groups, such as disabled people, meet collectively, critically analyse the constraints placed upon them by their social, economic and political environment within a historical framework, and devise strategies for their subsequent alleviation. The theory is premised upon the assumption that all individuals, notwithstanding their class or social position, are innately self-conscious and creative, and able to change their present (and often very oppressive) environment. Frierean strategies have profound implications for the potential role that can be played and expected by able-bodied professionals. Rather than adopting the role of the technocratic expert who analyses the problems and needs, and devises “solutions” for disabled people (analogous to Friere’s “banking” method of education), the professional adopts the role of a facilitator, enabling disabled people and other oppressed persons to reflect on and identify their needs and aspirations.

The following discussion attempts to firstly analyse further the concept of empowerment, as understood from a Frierean perspective, and secondly, to link this to the role played by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and the enhanced role that they can potentially play in fostering and facilitating the goals of empowerment and social transformation. Such an analysis will enrich the understanding of what it actually means for disabled people to live in an inclusive society, a concept that has been espoused, but as yet not fully explained by the disability movement.

PARTICIPATION, EMPOWERMENT AND THE ROLE OF NGOS

As with the term empowerment, the notion of participation has been imbued by ambiguity within contemporary development discourse, which has further resulted in confusion in the role that the voluntary sector, particularly (NGOs) should play in the field of development. Indeed, many theorists have used the terms empowerment and participation interchangeably, perceiving both terms to be inexorably linked, and this is the position adopted within this chapter. The approaches and strategies that are adopted toward participation varies, according to one’s ideological position and how power is conceptualised.

The concepts of “empowerment” and “participation” reflect understandings about the nature of power. Friere, in his conception of social transformation, maintains that power in society is essentially structured on the basis of class (7). In terms of empowerment and community participation, such a conception of power implies that by necessity, the powerless and the oppressed must appropriate for themselves power which has hitherto been in the possession of the powerful. Hence, by definition people can only empower themselves, and power is a “zero-sum” phenomenon.

NGOs have played a key role in the provision of community-based disability services. In order to address how CBR programmes can indeed become facilitators and promoters of the genuine and authentic empowerment, it may be instructive to consider the role that NGOs have and can play in the future with regard to empowerment and social transformation.

DEFINING NGOS

As with so many concepts within development, what constitutes an NGO is open to debate. By their very nature, NGOs are very heterogeneous entities, and range from large bi-lateral funding agencies operating in many countries (such as Oxfam, Save the Children Fund, and World Vision),

to very small organisations operating at village level, whose function is to provide for the immediate needs of their members. The latter are sometimes referred to as grassroots organisations.

Some even debate whether grassroots organisations are indeed NGOs. For example, Jenny Pearce (9) has argued that grassroots organisations differ from NGOs in three important ways. First, grassroots or people's organisations are comprised of individuals who are bound together by particular interests or common characteristics, such as class, gender, cultural identity and even disability. In contrast, the social composition of intermediary NGOs is generally comprised of middle class individuals, who for a multiplicity of reasons and motivations, have elected to work on behalf of or with the poor. Secondly, grassroots organisations invariably have limited yet quite specific aims and objectives. In contrast, NGOs act as intermediaries whereby they provide a link between bi-lateral and multi-lateral funding institutions and grassroots organisations. Thirdly, ultimately grassroots organisations are accountable to their members, whereas NGOs, despite rhetorical statements to the contrary, are ultimately accountable to their funders. Pearce concludes her analysis of the distinction between grassroots organisations and NGOs by stating "It is not helpful to use the term 'NGO' to encompass popular organisations as well as those intermediary institutions established to provide care, facilitate self-help and grassroots democracy, to supply technical assistance, or campaign on issues of importance to the poor. The failure to make this distinction contributes to a tendency to depoliticise popular organisations and politicise NGOs" (9).

The distinction between NGOs and popular organisations, as proposed by Jenny Pearce reflects contrasting conceptualisations of the nature of power. Notwithstanding their apparent heterogeneity, some writers maintain that there are common characteristics that can be identified among NGOs, which Green and Matthias have summarised as follows "... organisations that are formally constituted, with a primarily non-profit-seeking objective of a group or community wider than the direct membership of the organisation and with a decision-making authority independent of government. They may achieve their aims in a variety of ways ranging from direct service provision through to the support of other NGOs (10).

THE CHANGING FUNCTION THAT NGOS PLAY WITHIN DEVELOPMENT

The past two decades have witnessed an exponential growth in the number of NGOs, especially working in South Asia. Edwards and Hulme (11) have collated some illuminating statistics that demonstrate such growth. Within OECD member countries, the number of registered NGOs increased from 1,600 in 1980 to 2,970 in 1993. Over this same period, total expenditure of NGOs increased from US\$2.8 billion to US\$5.7 billion (12). Accompanying the growth in the number of NGOs has been a diversification in the roles and functions that they perform.

ASSESSING NGOS PERFORMANCE' AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Despite the exponential growth of NGO activity during the past decade, there are still questions regarding their effectiveness in achieving their stated objectives. Allied to this there is also a related debate regarding to whom NGOs are in fact accountable. Both these debates are of major concern to the development of the argument vis-a-vis empowerment and participation of poor and marginalised groups. It will be argued that failure of NGOs in achieving their objectives can be partially attributed to the inability to comprehend the processes and dynamics of social transformation as viewed from a Friarian perspective.

The evaluation of an NGO's effectiveness is indeed a problematical exercise, not least because there are few, in any, universally agreed criteria upon which such evaluations are and can be premised. In many instances, and certainly the case in some of the evaluation reports of disability projects in India, such evaluations tend to be instruments of propaganda. The aim is to impress donor agencies regarding the usefulness of the NGO's activities, (thereby providing evidence that the project of the NGO is of paramount importance, is indispensable, and warranting further financial support), rather than to critically analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the NGO's activities.

Edwards and Hulme (11) are of the opinion that "... there is increasing evidence that NGOs and GROs do not perform as effectively as had been assumed in terms of poverty-reach, cost-effectiveness, sustainability, popular participation (including gender), flexibility and innovation. In terms of service-provision, there is certainly evidence that NGOs are able to provide some services more cost-effectively than governments"

With regard to NGOs and grassroots organisation's performance in terms of promoting democracy, Edwards and Hulme are equally sceptical, partly because many NGOs have failed to adopt democratic structures and operational practices within their own organisations. Once again, the authors poignantly comment:- "... there is little evidence that NGOs and even GROs are managing to engage in the formal political process successfully, without becoming embroiled in the partisan politics and distortions that accompany the struggle for state power. The failure of many NGOs, and even GROs, to democratise their own structures makes them less effective in this process. ... Nevertheless, NGOs and GROs can be proud of their achievements in helping to cement human and political rights in many societies, and in democratising the informal political process by training grassroots activists, building stronger local institutions, promoting micro-policy reform, and undertaking education for citizenship"

It is also illuminating to look at what writers and practitioners from Southern-based countries consider to have been the impact of NGOs and "development projects" on improving the quality of life of the poor. Sithebisio Nyoni, founder director of the Organisation of Rural Association for Progress, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, has written a strong indictment of the impact that international NGOs and the development industry have had upon the poor, and it is worth considering the argument that he presents in some detail (13). It is also of interest to note that Nyoni, in founding and developing his own NGO, has adopted a Frierian approach to development. Nyoni is of the opinion that in general, NGOs and the resultant industry that has been generated around them have had a negligible impact upon hunger, poverty, and political instability throughout the developing world, which in most instances have remained largely "undeveloped". He comments that "Development has therefore ceased to have any meaning for the poor. In most countries it has become a political slogan used to mobilise the poor for political ends - promising them increased food production, participation and a good life which is never realised. Development is often used in a way contrary to what it means to the poor, with leaders pretending to accept development, but not giving it any substance.... As a result, the rural poor are increasingly being forced to become more and more dependent on their governments and international donor agencies to break the vicious cycles of poverty, hunger and powerlessness and to lead them to development. Almost 40 years of national and international development efforts have passed without any fundamental changes in the lives of the poor.

In agreement with Edwards and Hulme, Nyomi maintains the opinion that many NGOs have failed in the mandate to alleviate poverty and to act as facilitators for the empowerment and social transformation of the poor, because their own internal structures tend to be hierarchical, not democratic. If NGOs cannot listen to those who work within their organisation, then it is not at all surprising that they fail to listen to the view and interests of the beneficiaries of their services? Nyomi thus states that “Most development agencies are centres of power which try to help others change. But they do not change themselves. They aim at creating awareness among people yet they are not themselves aware of the negative impact on those they claim to serve. They claim to help people change their situation through participation, democracy, and self-help and yet they themselves are non-participatory, non-democratic and dependent upon outside help for their survival (13).

A further intractable problem continually faced by NGOs is accountability. This concept is generally understood to refer to the manner by which individuals and organisations report to identifiable and recognised authorities for the activities they perform. Both international and indigenous NGOs have multiple accountabilities. They are accountable “downwards” to their collaborating partners, those who are beneficiaries or client groups of the services they provide. In addition, they are accountable “upwards” to donor agencies and the government of the host countries in which they are operating. From a legal perspective, NGOs are solely accountable to their board of trustees. However, from a more ethical standpoint, many NGOs consider themselves to be accountable to their beneficiaries, especially for those that endorse a “people-centred” approach and ideological stance to development. Commenting upon the complexity of relationships that NGOs encounter in relation to multiple accountabilities, Brett states “The NGO acts as an intermediary between the donor and the consumer and market competition is excluded. The agency relationships involved are complex, and include those between NGOs and donors, consumers, home and host country governments and between managers and workers. They can also include those between foreign and local NGOs where the former sub-contract out to the latter. Since each of these has differing and conflicting interests and leverage, difficult problems of monitoring and enforcement arise (14).

KORTEN’S TYPOGRAPHY OF NGOS

David Korten (15) had argued that during the past 40 years there has been a four-fold evolution of the role played by NGOs. Although the analysis is presented in terms of four sequential “generations”, it must be noted that NGOs that have the characteristics of the first three generations can and do exist within the current development environment. Furthermore, all true development agencies have a philosophy or ideology vis-a-vis “development”, which in turn governs their operational approach and also their understanding of the root causes of poverty and underdevelopment. In the absence of such a coherent theory, Korten maintains that any development initiatives undertaken will be cosmetic and illusionary, and that in the long-term, “... runs the risk of inadvertently strengthening the very forces responsible for the conditions of suffering and injustice that it seeks to alleviate through its aid “An organisation cannot have a meaningful strategy without a development theory. ...This logic must make explicit the organisation’s assumptions regarding the forces that sustain the problem it is addressing .

It is therefore instructive to consider Korten’s analysis of the development of NGOs, to appreciate some reasons for the shortcomings of operational practice that have occurred in the past, as well as to provide some pointers to how NGOs might improve their performance in the future.

The first generation of NGOs, established in the aftermath of the First World War, were primarily concerned with the provision of humanitarian relief and welfare. Thus, services were provided on the basis of meeting immediate needs in the context of natural disasters or crisis situations, such as famines, floods, civil strife and war. Classic first generation NGOs were established by churches and missionary organisations in Africa throughout the colonial era. Such NGOs assume that short-term assistance will provide a sufficient impetus for long-term development generated from indigenous resources, principally provided by the public sector. Korten maintains that first generation NGOs invariably lack a coherent developmental theory and resultant strategy. While such efforts brought temporary alleviation of immediate and often acute needs, this approach did nothing to address the long-term impact of poverty and sustainability. Notwithstanding that the provision of relief and welfare still remains a legitimate activity for NGOs, first generation NGOs fail in meeting objectives associated with long-term development.

Recognising the limitations of providing solely humanitarian relief and welfare, the second generation of NGOs in the 1970s focussed their attention towards establishing community development projects. Such an approach differed from the former in that attention was given to institutional capacity building, in the belief that development initiatives that are started by NGOs will continue once external funding has been withdrawn. Thus, emphasis is given to self-reliance and the establishment of “self-help groups”, invariably based at village level. Often the second generation NGOs run parallel services to those provided by government. Furthermore, it is assumed that development initiatives are the result of a “partnership” being established between NGOs and the local community. It is also implicitly assumed that under-development is the result of local inertia and lack of initiative, though the potential for development and progress does reside within the local community. In this scenario, the function of NGOs is to act as a facilitator or catalyst that mobilises local community resources, rather than to be involved in direct service provision.

Describing the rationale behind second-generation NGOs, Korten states that “Second generation strategies differ in the extent to which they focus on human resource development or empowerment as the central issue. While second generation strategies almost universally involve a substantial focus on education, the human resource development tradition assumes that the problem lies exclusively with the individuals’ lack of skills and physical strength. The rallying cry of the human resource development group has been the ancient oriental proverb ‘Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day; teach him to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime’” (15).

NGOs that espouse a more radical or militant development ideology maintain that, though education and human resource development are important factors, by themselves they are insufficient to effectively deal with the issues of poverty and under-development, for education alone will not combat the entrenched and often exploitative positions held by local power elites. For such NGOs, under-development is the result of the lack of development on the part of individuals, (that is, using their naturally endowed abilities and potentials to their fullest extent), as well as exploitative economic, social and political structures inherent within contemporary local communities. The development strategies adopted by second generation NGOs, even those that see the power of local elites to be an issue, are perceived to be simplistic, for they fail to take into account the power wielded by national and international institutions, which make the efforts of village development seem rather paltry in comparison.

Over the past decade, NGOs have once again begun to question and re-evaluate the *raison d'être* of their approach to development. What Korten has classified as third generation NGOs have recognised that previous efforts by NGOs to achieve long-term development objectives have been limited. This has been explained by the fact that previous development efforts have benefited small pockets of communities or specifically defined groups, and that self-reliant development initiatives are unlikely to succeed without the continuous injection of outside capital that will assist long-term sustainability, Korten states that “A growing number of NGOs are coming to realise they need to exert greater leadership in addressing dysfunctional aspects of the policy and institutional setting of the villages and sectors within which they work. This means moving to a third generation strategy in which the focus is on facilitating sustainable changes in these setting on a regional or even national basis. The more fully the NGO embraces third generation programme strategies, the more it will find itself working in a catalytic, foundation-like role rather than a operational service delivery role, directing its attention to facilitating development by other organisations, both private and public, of the capacities, linkages and commitments required to address designated needs on a sustained basis” (16).

Korten further states that NGOs operating within third generation strategies will often work with governments, since the latter will command the resources that provide the infrastructure for service provision. Given this situation, the role of the NGO becomes one of influencing, but not of controlling the particular system (such as the health, educational or agricultural system). The underlying assumptions of development theory behind third generation NGOs is that the innate inertia that characterises many local communities is the result of the centralisation of economic resources that rarely, if ever, reaches the poor. Hence, the most appropriate development strategy is of a two-fold nature. First, to enhance the capacity of the poor in identifying their needs and aspirations, and secondly, through building alliances and partnerships with those elites who do hold power, with the objective of convincing them to adopt development strategies that meet the genuine needs of poor and marginalised groups. In describing the role played by third generation NGOs, Korten states that “The more fully the NGO embraces third generation programme strategies, the more it finds itself working in a catalytic, foundation-like role, rather than a service provider. It may find that it intervenes in complex national-scale institutional systems comprised of many organisations from both the public and private sectors. It must learn to strategically, positioning and repositioning its own limited resources where they will have the best prospect of shifting system dynamics in the desired direction” (15).

PEOPLE-CENTRED DEVELOPMENT AND PEOPLE’S MOVEMENTS

Korten has identified a fourth generation of NGOs, which focuses on people-centred development, and the institutional and capacity building of grassroots organisations (GROs), comprising of groups of beneficiaries of the services provided by the NGOs. These are synonymous with the people’s organisations that have been distinguished from mainstream NGOs by Jenny Pearce (9). Fourth generation NGOs are closely associated with the “self-help groups” that have been established by the NGOs that were involved in fieldwork for my doctoral thesis on the provision of community-based disability services in South India. Furthermore, as will be demonstrated, the philosophy and ideology that underpins a people-centred approach to development has a great deal in common with the Friarian approach to education, social transformation, and the empowerment of poor and marginalised groups.

The three generations of NGOs described thus far rely on third parties to provide resources and other technical expertise from outside the local community to achieve development-oriented goals, irrespective of how development theory and the resultant operational practices and roles are conceptualised. Fourth generation NGOs fundamentally differ in this respect, for it is assumed that the requisite knowledge and skills required to solve developmentally-orientated problems actually reside within the local community. This assumption is the very reason for the people-centred approach to development. Given that such knowledge and expertise does reside within local communities, the function and the role of NGOs is to facilitate and act as a catalyst in enabling people within the local community to identify their developmental needs, and the strategies to fulfil them. Thus, the key institutions are people's movements as well as people's organisations. Theorists subscribing to people-centred development maintain that all development initiatives should be as decentralised as possible.

In contrast to other forms of organisations, (notably the private and public sector), social movements and people's organisations tend to be driven by an ideology and vision, rather than service provision or the profit motive. It is Korten's belief that "The power of people's movements has largely been ignored in the field of development. Attention has been focused on money rather than the social energy as the engine of development. The irony is that the surest way to kill a movement is to smother it with money"(15).

People's organisations, which form the backbone of people-centred development, tend to have three defining characteristics. First, they tend to be mutual benefit organisations, that serve the interests and benefits of their members. Secondly, they tend to have democratic as opposed to hierarchical structures, resulting in their leaders being directly accountable to the membership. Thirdly, people's organisations tend to be self-financing. Furthermore, the central belief is that these organisations are conduits for the redistribution of political and economic power previously held by elites. This notion is further emphasised by the assumption that an organisation has a greater possibility of achieving its aims and objectives if financial resources and operational decisions are placed in the hands of its beneficiaries. Other organisations, such as first, second and third generation NGOs have a tendency to serve their own organisation's interests in preference to those of the groups that they are supposed to serve. Commenting upon the function that people's organisations can potentially play within a given society, David Korten states that "People's organisations serve many functions in people-centred development. They are instruments for distributing power within society by strengthening the economic and political power of the previously marginalised. They are the training grounds for democratic leadership and the institutional building blocks of democratisation. They create demands for greater responsiveness to grassroots concerns, providing the collective bargaining power that can enable landless people, small farmers and urban squatters to negotiate on more equal terms with the representatives of government bureaucracies or wealthy private patrons or corporations" (15).

Warren Nyamugasira (17), in agreement with Korten, has cogently argued that there has indeed been a fundamental shift in the roles that NGOs have played within the development process over the past ten years. However, rather than viewing the changes within a generational framework, Nyamugasira maintains that there has been a division of labour between Northern and Southern-based NGOs, which has not resulted in the enhancement of the social, economic and political well-

being of the poor. In fact, it has been argued that those who are poor and marginalised have been significantly excluded from setting any aspect of the development agenda. In the aftermath of the 1980s, many northern-based NGOs made the strategic decision to move away from direct service provision to advocacy as the primary focus, with service provision being the preserve of southern-based NGOs. Hence the role of NGOs based in so-called “developed” countries has become that of a catalyst for social change, through seeking to influence attitudes, changing policies of the government and of the key decision-makers such as the IMF and the World Bank. In effect, such NGOs have taken on the mantle of “the role of the ambassadors of the world’s poor”. Furthermore “They see their mission as being to represent the political concerns of the poor, injecting the voice of the traditionally voiceless into international decision-making, facilitating the two-way flow of information, and helping to make the world’s political and economic institutions more broadly accountable” (17).

The division of labour between northern and southern-based NGOs, in terms of advocacy and direct service provision respectively, is further based on the premise that southern-based NGOs, due to the fact that they are closer to the beneficiaries, will by definition facilitate greater “local empowerment”. It is believed that indigenous NGOs will indeed have the comparative advantage in securing long-term and sustainable development, since they are in a position to hear and thereby represent the authentic voice of the poor. It is assumed that these NGOs will have a greater and more in-depth knowledge of the social, cultural, political context that characterise local communities, than international NGOs. However, this last point is indeed a contentious issue. Clement, states that “There is a danger of assuming that Southern NGOs necessarily speak for the poor and the marginalised people. This is a matter which is sometimes avoided out of politeness or fear of offending (Southern) NGO colleagues. Listening to those on the margins requires a stretch for anyone who has become part of the ‘development set’. It is harder when based in the North, but even when working for an NGO in the South, there are many filters, barriers and distractions. How to genuinely listen and represent (as opposed to speaking for) different poor communities is a significant challenge for all NGOs. ... What seems to you to be our silence, our reticence, and our lack of purpose is really in fact our strength, our wisdom, and our knowledge” (Clement, personal communication, quoted in (17)).

The above quotation highlights the fact that empowerment is an ongoing, continuous process, and has many characteristics which resonate with the principals and axioms of naturalistic inquiry (18). Similarly, commenting on the role of both government and NGOs within the South Asian context, Menike states that “Numerous programmes are initiated by governments and NGOs in developing countries, to ‘empower’ the Poor. ... When we look at these programmes, we get a feeling, whether initiated by governments or NGOs, (their programmes) are based on the false assumption that we, the Poor, do not know how to overcome our poverty and improve our condition; that we do not have the knowledge about the cause of our poverty and how to overcome it, and that we are lethargic and tend to accept our poverty as our fate¼ ...For us, all of this is quite hilarious. Those who plan their ‘empowerment’ interventions clearly do not understand our reality, our priorities, our wishes, our thought processes, our constraints and our needs” (19).

THE WAY FORWARD - PAULO FRIERE REVISITED: ADOPTING FRIERIAN TECHNIQUES OF SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE OPERATIONAL PRACTICES OF NGOS

Given that the effort of NGOs to make a significant contribution to the alleviation of poverty in the developing world, have not been very successful, and given the continuing impasse of “the development project” largely failing in their attempt to transform the lives of the poor and the oppressed, what hope is there that future development initiatives will be more successful? As has been argued throughout this chapter, it is maintained that there is indeed hope, particularly if Freirian strategies of social transformation are pursued, in conjunction with the people-centred development as advocated by David Korten of the People-Centred Development Forum. As will be demonstrated below, there is indeed a great deal of similarity between the approaches and ideologies adopted by Friere and Korten.

David Korten trenchantly argues, in agreement with many other development theorists, that the development agenda of the past 40 years has been dominated by the belief that the key to long-term sustainable development is through the pursuance of strategies that promote economic growth. In reality, such policies have in fact failed to benefit the poor. In his critique of conventional development thought, Korten states that “Guided in their development by the growth-centred vision, the institutions of our society are geared to producing growth for the benefit of the few without regard to social or environmental consequences. This is the heart of the failure of these institutions to ensure justice, sustainability and inclusiveness¹⁴. Growth is important, but it must be a new kind, appropriate to our condition. For this reason we must address ourselves to transformation as the development priority of the 1990s” (15).

Korten defines the rationale of development thus, “Development is a process by which the members of a society increase their personal and institutional capacities to mobilise and manage resources to produce sustainable and justly distributed improvements in their quality of their life consistent with their own aspirations” (15).

Korten is not alone in holding that a prerequisite for effective development is the adoption of a people-centred approach and that priorities for the development agenda are set by those who will benefit from such services. John Clark states that “At its broadest, ‘development’ means quite simply ‘improving the society’. Since society comprises no more than the people it is made up of, development therefore means ‘enabling people to achieve their aspirations’. Development is not a commodity to be measured by GNP statistics. It is a process of change that enables people to take charge of their own destinies and realise their full potential. It requires building up in the people the confidence, skills, assets and freedoms necessary to achieve this goal” (20).

In a similar vein, Robert Chambers has argued that the “development project” has largely failed the poor, primarily because in the past, undue emphasis has been placed upon the role of professionals, who are invariably expatriates. Such emphasis tends to marginalise and exclude the voices of the poor, since privilege and credence are given to the values and modes of thought that are traditionally associated with western-based professional culture. These tend to be characterised by an inherent bias towards conservatism, on a linear conception of progress, and by an undue emphasis placed upon specialisation, precision and quantifiable measurement. Emphasis and privilege

are given to the “core” or the “first”, while those in the “periphery” or “last” are to all intents and purposes, marginalised and excluded. In an attempt to present a convincing counter-argument of this historically dominant hegemony, Chambers states that “The normative level is simple: development should be people-centred, people come before things; and the poorest people before the less poor. It is right to put the last first, to give priority to those who are more deprived - the poor, physically weak, vulnerable, isolated and helpless, and to help them change these conditions. It is also right to enable them to identify and demand what they want and need. At the conceptual level, development is not a progress in a single direction, but a process of continuous adaptation, problem-solving and opportunity - exploiting under pressure. ... Development is not movement towards a fixed goal but a continuous adaptation to maximise well-being in changing conditions (21).

That the vast majority of NGOs have not been successful in fulfilling their mandate in poverty reduction and have in fact rarely involved the poor and marginalised people (not least those with disabilities), in setting development priorities, surely begs the question why should this be the case. The gulf in the rhetoric and practice of development, that are founded in the principles of people-centred development and Freirian theories of social transformation and change, remains as wide as ever. It also gives rise to the question of what practical strategies and operational practices should be adopted by NGOs in order to transform such rhetorical statements into reality? Attempts to answer both of these questions exist in the writings of Hope and Timmel (22), who have produced a set of training manuals regarding social transformation specifically written for community workers, as well as the work of Robert Chambers.

Hope and Timmel, in the construction of their training manuals, have drawn heavily upon the principles of social transformation and education, adopted by Paulo Freire. In addition, fundamental to their approach is the belief that the unfettered operation of the market and structural adjustment policies as propagated by institutions as the World Bank have largely failed the poor. What is called for is a radical transformation in the social, economic, political and legal structures upon which societies in the developing world are premised, founded upon the principles of “participatory democracy”. Hence, Hope and Timmel state that “We need a system based on participatory democracy at the political level, and economic democracy built on a deep sense of ‘the common good’. We have to recognise that in the so-called ‘free world’, only the strong are ‘free’. ... The ‘free market’ is extolled as the only system for creating wealth. It is true that capitalism has created wealth in a way that socialism has generally failed to do, but without limits and socially responsible legislation, this wealth has not generally ‘trickled down’. [The process of transformation] involves creating new education systems, new patterns of health care, new legal systems as well as a framework for the economy” (22).

Hope and Timmel further maintain that some societies have experienced a high degree of participatory democracy, usually occurring after some historic moment in the life of a particular society. However, it is maintained that when high levels of participatory democracy do occur, structures are constructed that institutionalise such practices. Failure to do so will result in the withering away of such democracy.

Freire has argued that development and education, perceived in terms of increased self-consciousness, are inexorably linked, and that the problem-based method of education is indeed a

pre-requisite for the liberation and oppression of poor and marginalised groups. The ultimate goal of such a process is to enable those who are poor and marginalised to fulfil their creative potentials. Again, parallels can be drawn with the dynamics of social change and human nature that were discussed, particularly with regard to the theoretical framework constructed by Cole (23). Within this context, Hope and Timmel state that “Development and education are first about liberating people from all that holds them back from a full human life. Ultimately, development and education are about transforming society. Development, liberation and transformation are all aspects of the same process” (22).

The preceding arguments will have profound impacts on the manner in which NGOs perceive their role within development process, which will inevitably affect operational practice. It is argued that the role of the development worker is two-fold. First, to encourage and facilitate the local community to claim their rightful share of government resources. This will involve encouraging the community to become aware of what government services are available to them, as well as the fostering and building of alliances with other community members. Secondly, to act as catalysts to enable the local community to innovate and establish mechanisms of meeting their own needs. Of fundamental importance to this objective is to explore, through the application of the Freirian techniques of education, (i.e. the dynamic, and interactive process of reflection, critical analysis, resulting in action), and to identify alternative sources of funding to meet these needs and aspirations.

These two objectives will also have a profound impact upon the manner in which NGO professionals operate in the daily practice with beneficiaries. The implications and ramifications for the role of the professional vis-a-vis their role in the development process is cogently argued by Freire in the following manner. “Some of the dominant class join the oppressed in their struggle for liberation. Theirs is a fundamental role and has been so throughout the history of the struggle. However, as they move to the side of the exploited they almost always bring with them the marks of their origin. Their prejudices include a lack of confidence in the people’s ability to think, to want, and to know. So they run the risk of falling into a type of generosity as harmful as their oppressors. Though they desire to transform the unjust order, they believe that they must be the executors of this transformation ... They talk about people but they do not trust them; and trusting the people is the indispensable to revolutionary change. A real humanist can be identified more by his trust in the people, which engages him in their struggle, than by a thousand actions in their favour, but without their trust” (7).

Robert Chambers has made some practical suggestions, both for professionals working in the field and also at an institutional level, on how development can indeed become more people-centred, thereby taking the knowledge and values of the poor and marginalised into account when planning, managing and evaluating development programmes. Chambers attributes the apparent failure of the development industry to inappropriate thought processes and values held by western development practitioners. What is called for is a re-evaluation of these value systems that have maintained hegemony throughout the development enterprise during the past 40 years. Fundamental to this reorientation is for professionals to genuinely believe in the validity and inherent worth of locally-generated knowledge. This knowledge base may or may not resonate with western conceptions of rationality. It is imperative that professionals “hand the stick over” to the potential beneficiaries. In delineating the characteristics of the professional that genuinely espouses a “bottom-up” people-

centred approach to development, Chambers states that “The challenge can be expressed as the paragon of the new professional. She is committed to the poor and weak, and to enabling them to gain more of what they want and need. She is democratic and participatory in management style; she is a good listener; embraces error and believes in falling forwards; finds pleasure in enabling others to take initiatives; monitors and controls only a core minimum of standards and activities; is not threatened by the unforeseeable; does not demand targets for disbursements and achievements; abjures punitive management; devolves authority, expecting her staff to use their own best judgement at all times; gives priority to the front-line; and rewards honesty. For her, watch-words are truth, trust and diversity (24).

At the institutional level, Chambers makes six specific recommendations. First, the NGO or government funding agency should be committed to ensuring the long-term sustainability of the development initiative, and should not be bound by necessarily expecting to see “results” within the initial three-year funding cycle. Thus there should be a commitment to long-term financial continuity. Secondly, NGOs should be encouraged to establish a network of allies with other organisations working in the same field or using the same approaches. The rationale here is to facilitate information sharing. Thirdly, it is recommended the development initiatives should start in a small way and grow incrementally. Fourthly, there should be a large degree of flexibility, so that the project has the ability to evolve according to the principles and axioms espoused by participatory development. Fifthly, it is imperative to encourage and support the development of grass-roots staff. This further enhances the participatory nature of the project, as it is often the case that grass-roots staff have gained the confidence of the poor, and therefore have a more nuanced understanding of their needs and aspirations. Sixthly and lastly, Chambers recommends that expansion and growth of the project should be grounded upon the experience that has been acquired at the grass-roots level (25).

The foregoing discussion of the challenges, pitfalls and failures of NGOs in the pursuance of their overall stated objectives of poverty alleviation and the empowerment/social transformation of poor, oppressed and marginalised groups throughout the developing world, point to the following conclusions. First, long-term “sustainable development” will only be effective when the priorities for the development agenda are set by the community, particularly those who will potentially benefit from services. Secondly, the role of NGOs is that of catalysts and facilitators in assisting those who are poor and subject to oppression, in identifying their needs and aspirations, and consequently devising strategies to realise them. Thirdly, and arising from the above, the priorities for development objectives cannot be devised and orchestrated by exogenous agencies, such as NGOs - they must come from the grassroots.

The necessity for a “bottom-up”, people-centred approach to development is now beginning to be recognised by the World Bank. In a “first-cut” draft of the World Bank’s “World Development Report 2000/1”, which has a focus on attacking poverty, a great deal of emphasis is placed upon the multi-dimensionality of poverty and the imperative need to foster participation. The following excerpts from the draft summary of the report provide a feeling for the genre of the proposed strategy. The report states “In examining the nature of poverty, it is incumbent upon us to start with the voices of the poor themselves. These voices tell us that poverty as perceived by the poor is multi-dimensional, going well beyond monetary income and consumption to include education and health, and beyond these to include risk and vulnerability and a sense of voicelessness and powerlessness” “While there are legitimate differences across societies and across communities on what constitutes poverty,

there are enough commonalities across these, as captured in international declarations and in the voices of the poor themselves, to provide the core objectives for a strategy attacking poverty. These can be classified under the categories of empowerment, security and opportunity.” “Voicelessness and powerlessness are intimately linked to material poverty, but they also afflict groups in society such as women and ethnic minorities. An inability to influence decisions which affect their lives, at the local and the national level, is an independent feature of poverty, but also helps to explain outcomes in other dimensions such as health or education” (26).

EMPOWERMENT, “SOCIAL EXCLUSION” AND THE ROLE OF NGOS

NGOs can effectively play a part in the empowerment and social transformation of disabled people. “Social exclusion”, was a term originally used by French scholars with reference to poverty alleviation and lack of participation, and both concepts are of prime interest to the disability movement. Arjan de Haan (27) has found the concept of social exclusion to be useful in contemporary discourse within the field of development for two reasons, both of which have direct relevance to the issue of disability. First, social exclusion as a concept perceives deprivation and poverty as being multi-dimensional in character, not being exclusively concerned with the level of income per se, but with other factors as well. Thus, poverty and deprivation are perceived in a multi-dimensional manner, that encompasses additional factors which include the inability to participate within the mainstream of society, the inability and resultant precariousness of securing employment, and the inaccessibility to basic education and health care. Thus, the social exclusion debates have broadened the parameters of the discussion regarding poverty alleviation, which was traditionally solely concerned with material well-being. This debate is now seen in more broader terms, encompassing “participation, autonomy and self-respect” (28). There has been a further composite shift away from debates exclusively concerned with employment towards the more holistic notion of livelihoods. In recognition of these trends, Robert Chambers states that “The raw reality for the majority of the very poor in the world, in the South, and either in rural areas or in the informal urban sector, is not one of jobs in the Northern, industrial sense. It is a reality of diverse livelihoods with multiple activities by different family members at different times, exploiting varied and changing resources and opportunities” (25).

Secondly, rather than being a static entity, the concept of social exclusion focuses upon the dynamic processes that are inherent within the mechanisms and institutions that systematically exclude those who are poor and marginalised from mainstream involvement in society. It is therefore apparent that social exclusion is linked to a number of concepts that have already been developed vis-a-vis disability studies and naturalistic inquiry. Hence, it is argued by the disability movement that disabled people are systematically excluded from contemporary society by the pejorative social attitudes that they encounter, as well as the inhospitable physical environment in which they reside.

The genesis of the concept of social exclusion is derived from France, and has been influential in the development of social policy in that country during the 1980s. Many different definitions and interpretations have been given to the concept, with de Haan beginning his article quoting the one given by the European Foundation as “... a rupture of social bonds - a process through which individuals or groups are wholly or partially excluded from participation in the society in which they live” (29).

Other scholars have defined the concept in a multiplicity of ways, and as in the case with most concepts in development, and in alignment with the precepts of naturalistic inquiry, each is dependent upon how the process of social change is understood. Hilary Silver (30), quoted by de Haan, has devised a tripartite paradigm to explain the different approaches to social exclusion. Notwithstanding the caveat that any schema is inevitably reductionist, such an approach can indeed be instructive. The manner in which concepts such as social exclusion are theoretically understood have profound practical significance, for different theoretical understandings imply and give rise to different policy prescriptions and outcomes. Silver's schema of social exclusion is as follows.

- a) The solidarity paradigm perceives social exclusion as a rupture in the social bonds that exist between an individual and the society in which he lives, and is related to both the cultural and moral spheres of life. Those who are poor and marginalised are considered to be outsiders. This conception of social exclusion implies an emphasis upon national solidarity, political rights and duties.
- b) The specialisation paradigm, derived from the Hobsian notion of individual liberalism, implies that the individual has the ability to cross boundaries of social stratification through the process of social and economic mobility. Furthermore, the notion of citizenship implies a contractual exchange of rights and obligations between individuals within a given society. According to this paradigm, social exclusion is perceived in terms of discrimination, which is the result of unenforced social and political rights, as well as market failure.
- c) The monopoly paradigm views social exclusion as a consequence of the establishment of group monopolies within a society which is characterised by hierarchical power relations. Those who hold social, economic and political power actively restrict the access of others to such powers. In contrast to the specialisation paradigm, the distinction between group identity and inequality overlap. These inequalities are mitigated by "social democratic citizenship", which when implemented, will result in those who have been systematically excluded being able to actively participate in the contemporary society in which they live.

Irrespective of which particular paradigm of social exclusion one adheres to, de Haan maintains that all three have the following common defining characteristics. First, social exclusion is seen as the juxtaposition of social integration. Thus emphasis is placed upon the importance of all members of any society being part of a cohesive entity. Secondly, as has already been mentioned above, social exclusion is considered to be a multi-dimensional construct, which has relevance and the potential for poignant analysis in the political, social and economic spheres of people's lives. Thirdly, social exclusion is perceived as a process, in which the dynamics of mechanisms and institutions exclude the poor and marginalised. Hence, attention is focused upon the manner in which the institutions within society either foster or constrain it.

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