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The future of development and development of the future

Rosita Dellios

Bond University, rosita_dellios@bond.edu.au

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The future of development and development of the future

Abstract

Extract:

Excerpt from an opening speech by Rosita Dellios at the 'Development and Future Studies' conference of the International Institute for Development Studies (IIDS, Australia) in collaboration with NKC Centre for Development Studies (NCDS), Bhubaneswar, Orissa, India, 3-6 January 2002.

Keywords

development, globalisation, the information revolution

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Conference Report:

The Future of Development and Development of the Future

by Rosita Dellios

Excerpt from an opening speech by Rosita Dellios at the 'Development and Future Studies' conference of the International Institute for Development Studies (IIDS, Australia) in collaboration with NKC Centre for Development Studies (NCDS), Bhubaneswar, Orissa, India, 3-6 January 2002.

The Third IIDS International Conference on Development and Future Studies has come at a particularly crucial juncture in world history. Economic globalisation in conjunction with the Information Revolution has brought greater and easier flows of trade, greater choice and increased empowerment of the individual or special interest groups. Web pages, for example, have become tools of self-identification on a global scale.

The costs, however, have posed an enormous challenge to development. A new class barrier has emerged, that of information rich and information poor; for information has now become a resource like oil or land. Social inequalities are sharpened through information access to the wealthy, but less so to the poor. As UN Sec-Gen Kofi Annan said: 'Despite all the talk of globalisation, the bulk of the world remains largely untouched by it. To date the nascent yet burgeoning information revolution is not a worldwide phenomenon.' (1)

Development in the context of globalisation and the Information Revolution entails accessing this new form of power. To ignore it would be not to stand still in a whirlwind of change, but rather to become more vulnerable and less self-empowered.

Adaptation is, realistically, the best strategy. This means cultural values drive the new technologies and opportunities, and not the other way around - of the new technologies driving cultural values. Otherwise, what might appear as an exercise in technological 'catch-up' might end up as an exercise in 'giving up' one's civilisational referents, and thus giving in to the dominant ideological posture of the present age: consumer culture in a capitalist world order.

Such unbalanced development is not development at all but a retrograde step in the cultivation of human society. Thus we may end up with a global village without villages, with urban environments devoid of poets, and in a world borderless to financial flows but not to the desperate tide of displaced people.

At this juncture in history it will be important to address the dangers of being rich and not only poor; of whether the new world mandala can be centred on something more substantial than the 'American dream' - which has turned on September 11 to an American nightmare.

Perhaps development needs to develop in simple and unexpected ways - bringing villages back to the global village, poets and not only traffic controls to the cities, a greater sense of responsibility as citizens and not only rights, and a creative capacity to adapt the future to civilisational values, not to use the future to subvert the past.

Reference

1. Quoted in R. Alan Hedley, 'The Information Age: Apartheid, Cultural Imperialism or Global Village?' *Social Science Computer Review*, Spring 1999.

Centre for East-West Cultural and Economic Studies,

The School of Humanities and Social Sciences,

Bond University, Queensland, Australia