

Integrated Development

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Integrated development is described, including definitions, origins and its value as an improvement in development activities. Spanning all sectors, worldviews, environments and circumstances, integrated development is introduced as an ideal towards which responsible development practitioners and agencies are moving. As it encompasses all aspects of existence it necessarily includes spiritual and other esoteric considerations, which on the surface may not seem to accord with modern worldviews. By contrast, the paper shows that reflection on the ideal reveals it as the culmination of human insight, experience and scholarship. In describing a rising awareness of integrated thinking, the paper also introduces the World Prize for International Integrated Development.

The paper addresses questions I have been asked about international integrated development and creation of the World Prize. It does this by taking multiple approaches, namely: describing integrated development and integrated thinking; presenting some relevant aspects of history from international development and the great traditions; postulating an evolution from technological to integrated approaches in development; summarizing a personal realization of the essentialness of integrated development; including responses to media questions, and briefly introducing the World Prize.

What is Integrated Development?

Integrated development is the acknowledgement that all components in a natural system affect all others. The concept is ancient although sometimes neglected in mechanistic or single sector development actions. It has become more widely appreciated in recent times as essential to all of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), which recognize the artificiality of separation between development approaches in rich and poor nations and between sectors. The diverse interrelationships that constitute all projects, programs and policies are effectively unified by this integrative philosophy. Broader than the so-called integrated rural development approaches of the past, the definition assumes integrative thinking.

Integrative Thinking

The tendency of increased specialization in technological and social science education has benefits in understanding components of systems. However, it also creates gaps when specialists have difficulty in appreciating developments

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of other fields. Added to these *sector gaps* is the continuing diversity in worldviews between cultures, including belief systems. Integrative thinking is a deliberate attempt to remain aware of such potential gaps by widening one's perspective. This is explained in more detail in a presentation made to the NIC gathering of global managers in Warsaw;¹ a video of the same presentation can be viewed at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=limb-US5RHY>>.

In essence, the presentation flows from Sach's² description for the formulation of the Sustainable Development Goals that '*sustainable development is the holistic integration of economic, social, and environmental objectives in an approach to scientific analysis, governance, problem solving, and human action*'. In developing country settings, this definition can be understood to encompass all that has been said above if social objectives are considered to embrace culture, beliefs, religion and worldviews, including those that do not separate religion from governance.

In assisting developing countries, aid focuses through projects, programs and problem-solving to which foreign or culturally-urban national experts apply their experience and training. That training and experience usually defines experts' worldviews, and so the development context is automatically assessed from what they see. This is the first constraint to integrated thinking. It may be supplemented by socializing ideas from similar development projects elsewhere, which can represent a second constraint. A third constraint can also occur among broader thinkers when they apply a mental model from their background or higher learning. These three natural limitations to human decision-making are presented graphically as window scenes in the presentation,³ which is taken from the World Bank's 2015 World Development Report.⁴

The World Development Report concludes that '*development professionals are themselves subject to the biases and mistakes that can arise from thinking automatically, thinking socially, and using mental models. ... Thus development practice requires an iterative process of discovery and learning, which implies spreading time, money, and expertise over several cycles of design, implementation, and evaluation.*'⁵ Underpinning this call for integrated thinking is recognition of some development axioms arising from millennia of experience, which is commonly expressed as the basic elements, such as food and shelter, being met as a prerequisite for the refinements of civilization such as governance, social equity and political ideologies. It is not a new idea, either in international development or in the great traditions.

Some History in International Development

The success of post World War II reconstruction and development programs ushered in modern international development assistance for nations designated as underdeveloped or pre-industrial. Also otherwise known as development co-operation in an attempt to link donors and recipients in a partnership, industrialized nations provided development assistance to specific projects. Aid was particularly focused on the agricultural and infrastructure sectors linked to

targeted higher education support that aimed to sustain development by creating local capacity. The ensuing material development in all nations with stable economic policies and governance led to social development programs, notably in health and education, and subsequently in expansion of donor objectives.

By 2000 the approach had evolved into the Millennium Development Goals,⁶ which purported to offer a unified strategy for global development. With the declaration that these goals had been achieved, the subsequent approach is the current Sustainable Development Goals,⁷ which are on balance a more considered formulation based on experience and research. A focus on sustainability from the 1990s had produced an awareness of the integrated nature of all systems as an explanation for the variable success of development projects. Usually interpreted in terms of the natural environment and rights of future generations, the desire for sustainability appears compromised when it can be traced to a fundamental existential drive, notably a fear of non-existence.⁸ Integrated thinking is seen as an approach more akin to the natural ways of human decision-making and action.

In practical terms, integrated development can reduce project costs and improve efficiencies, services and outputs in terms of beneficial development outcomes. This results primarily from reduced wastage and distraction by unforeseen consequences. Of course, it is not a pragmatic programmatic approach that can be reduced to a handbook, and as a consequence the ideal of integrated development is approached as improvements to existing development practice. In this way a progression in awareness can be seen in its description in one circumstance as *'the deliberate approach to connect the design, delivery and evaluation of programs across disciplines and sectors to produce an amplified, lasting impact on people's lives.'*⁹ The World Bank has adopted what may be seen as steps towards this way of thinking.¹⁰ Others familiar with specific sectors take different steps toward the ideal, as indicated in the advice that *'all interventions in all sectors in fragile and conflict affected states should contribute to tackling conflict and fragility as a primary or secondary set of objectives.'*¹¹ Now prevalent in research¹² serving development, academic, governmental, professional and NGO terminology, the approach is acknowledged in the titles of some entities^{13,14} and in the United Nations University conclusions for addressing poverty reduction and unsustainable consumption and production in the implementation of Agenda 21.¹⁵

In recognizing the need to lead professionals from single disciplinary approaches, UN programs and other mechanisms have sought means of encouraging ever-wider worldviews in development practitioners. Integrated development recognizes this need to think more broadly than conventional cross-disciplinary approaches. It is not as easy as repeating the same project or policy design across different situations.¹⁶ This is beginning in such examples as the inter-relationships between the goals of development, for example for peace-building and state-building linked to poverty alleviation at the stage of programming.¹⁷ Similarly, the UNDP-UNEP Poverty Environment Initiative has adopted an approach to international development that integrates poverty

reduction, environmental improvement, institutional development, planning, policy formulation, budgeting, reporting, monitoring, governance and recipient worldviews to agree in a common goal while remaining open to shifts in public opinion and opportunities that arise.¹⁸

But as introduced earlier, perhaps the most significant global focus on integrated development is the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the United Nations in September 2015 for the next 15 years' approaches to international development. The SDGs apply globally not only to developing nations because they recognize the integrated nature of all human activity. Programs for poor and rich nations alike will begin with integrated designs that encompass technical with all other aspects of human values and environmental interventions. The SDGs have therefore been popularly described as the '9 Ps' of international integrated development that address people, planet and prosperity through policies, political will, planning, platforms, participation and partnerships.¹⁹

All of these approaches to raising awareness have in turn enhanced appreciation of the teachings of the great religious traditions about the integrated nature of all things, including human values and worldviews.

Integrated Thinking in the Great Traditions

Mentioning religion can turn off some modern readers that feel learned society has moved beyond faith. One may readily accept this view without subscribing to it by noting that such an attitude is inevitably accompanied by assumptions of morality and values derived from millennia of religions. Some of our greatest minds have persisted in reminding us that neglect of spiritual matters culminates in social chaos and personal angst. I do not propose to review the field. My own analysis through a comparison of environmental care in Buddhism and Christianity is the book 'Religion and Agriculture', which may be also read online.²⁰ Here I briefly present some current examples that illustrate that integrated thinking is a hallmark of what is often referred to as wisdom.

The choice of the subject for ecumenical agreement by the World Parliament of Religions was arresting environmental decline.²¹ As I have argued in the book referred to in the preceding paragraph, this is not a primary concern of the great traditions; rather it is a product of the primary concern of spiritual development. Nevertheless, the choice is practical and timely since it accords with the modern associations of ungodly human behaviour that have substituted for abandoned rites and beliefs in a secular belief system. In addition, it avoids the contentious areas of difference that have distinguished the orders, sects and rifts of the great traditions. As a unifying theme a focus on the human-environment interactions incidentally encourages integrated thinking – and where it flows into practical applications it approaches integrated development. In more objective terms the project continues in such prestigious institutions as Yale University through its Forum on Religion and Ecology.²²

Within the most hierarchical of the great traditions, a recent encyclical similarly addresses the need for integrated understanding.²³ The Pope's paper encompasses the wide global scholarship available to the Vatican, and in addressing '*care for our common home*' uses the terminology of integrated thinking throughout, specifically using version of the word *integrated* more than 40 times. In particular the essay considers '*elements of an integral ecology, one which clearly respects its human and social dimensions*'.²⁴ Far from being the Church following popular opinion, this is an attempt to redirect concerned and thinking persons to an attitude of integration in their lives, and as a consequence to what is otherwise perceived as a social or environmental issue. Understanding that our individualistic era requires its own language, the encyclical includes the statement '*nothing in this world is indifferent to us*',²⁵ which by implication the serious reader automatically understands *and we cannot exist by being indifferent to anything in the world*. Scholars in all traditions have expressed similar insights.

Building on centuries of scholarship within that Catholic tradition, a cultural evolutionary interpretation of environmental change and competition for resources may be seen as an integrated approach. This means of improving modern understanding of the human-as-part-of-the-environment approach is through anthropological studies of the few traditional societies that continue to live according to their evolved interaction with the local environment. Scholars take the cultural evolution from traditional societies to the emergence of civilization based on peasant agriculture as a basis for integrating human aspirations in both material and spiritual terms. Applying lessons from such studies of cultural evolution to modern industrial society has spurred a renewed emphasis on the broad intent of religious teachings of compassion, loving-kindness and stewardship. This approach may be seen as a preliminary step towards the evolutionary theologian Teilhard de Chardin's Omega Point where the distinction between spiritual and material development disappears.²⁶

More pragmatic practitioners may not dwell in such philosophic depths yet they too have noted that modern separation of technological approaches from the environment in which they are applied limits their relevance, and in noting this they also define the lost values of integrated development.

From Technology to Integrated Approaches

A major focus of development in poor nations has been technological. Applying principles of sustainability to technology led to a revival of an ill-defined field known as appropriate technology. Appropriate technology is ipso facto sustainable, but in practice the field has experienced similar undesired collateral impacts to all development projects when unforeseen factors intervene in sound technologies; expressed in the terms of the World Development Report described earlier,²⁷ while the approach sought to reduce reliance on automatic thinking, it relied on social thinking and mental models. Appropriate was often subsumed within the term adjectival descriptor *sustainable*, which was applied

to sector specific projects, such as agriculture becoming sustainable-agriculture, and so on for other sectors including; energy, transportation, economics, business, income, architecture, governance and culture.

The field of appropriate technology claimed philosophical roots in Schumacher's *'intermediate technology'*,²⁸ which resulted from his experience with approaches in India that integrated human needs with material development. It is thought by some practitioners that the concept of integrated development was reintroduced to Western development experience through Schumacher's appreciation of Eastern and in particular Buddhist teachings about humans and nature. Today, the field may be experiencing resurgence²⁹ that acknowledges all possible variables and brings multiple disciplines with an understanding of local aspirations, but remains constrained by its appellation of *technology*, which is surely not the central requirement of all human situations. Notwithstanding that constraint, it may be seen as a similar approach as the integrated development that applies in all nations and situations. It provides a means of personal development of an integrated worldview.

Appreciating Integrated Development

Integrated development and the integrated thinking on which it relies can also be described as a gradual process of insight. This is the theme of a collation in which I reflected on my own broad education and its influence on the understanding I accumulated across 40 years in international development.³⁰ In the introduction, I noted that this process *'revealed the lost element of wholeness that once characterized good science, good lives and wisdom'*. This contrasted with the observation that *'much of international research is a mirror image of our own countries'* research, irrespective of different culture and worldviews.

In suggesting *'that depth in scientific understanding must partner breadth or else the parts that are assumed to make up the whole will in fact undermine holism'*, the argument observes that our era *'rewards technology over scientific understanding and then mistakes technological for holistic understanding'*. Thus *'the storyline of this book might be said to be the awakening of a scientist'* through initial technological research gradually accommodating wider contextual factors that were integrated into the later works. This retrospective view allows reductionist approaches to be contextualized as *'useful tools for working within our mental limitations'* that require care in application to the natural uncontrolled circumstances of real life. And from this perspective it is seen that *'the scientific method itself is an insightful means of removing human biases while acknowledging the role of intuition'*. But with the cultivation of intuition having declined along with the understanding of science as vocation, technological progress can be expected to continue to produce unforeseen outcomes.

Such reflection from over 40 years of development experience can be condensed into four observations:

- early applied technical research produced some practical outcomes of varying durability;

- interventions that significantly changed the natural environment proved to be inconsistent;
- research, education and development spasmodically produce extremely high rates of return, and
- insight guides real development served by science and non-rational understanding.

I have presented this personal experience here to illustrate that integrated development is not readily appreciated intellectually, partly because it includes non-rational elements. Such elements are often mistaken for matters outside the purview of professionals in the social and technological sciences, which in itself is a reflection of a cultural poverty in parts of the Western-influenced world. As should be clear from the preceding sections, an integrated view of life is the aspiration embedded in the word *science* and in the realizations of great minds across millennia. For those reasons at least, integrated thinking in international development should not be foreign to educated professionals. However, recognizing the difficulty of maintaining balanced learning in the training of modern professionals, the concept warrants explication in papers such as this, and the creation of awareness-raising mechanisms such as the World Prize for International Integrated Development.

What is the World Prize for International Integrated Development?

The World Prize is an annual international award considered as the highest honour to a person engaged in an integrated approach to international cooperation and development aid. It is oriented to the development of the less developed regions of the world. Outstanding track records are rewarded for using integrated approaches through project implementation, fieldwork, methodologies or promulgation of integrated theories from experience. The idea of a Prize emerged from concerned professionals experienced in all major international development agencies, including the World Bank, the Asian, African and other Development Banks, consulting groups, UN and bilateral aid agencies and NGOs following academic and practitioner trends. Of course, integrated development in international development cooperation cannot be separated from global interactions. The inclusion of *international* in the title of the Prize recognizes this and indicates that the Prize focuses on contributions to development that assists persons in poorer parts of the world. See <worldprize.life> for details.³¹ Upon announcement of the Prize, media interest generated some responses to specific questions, such as the following.

Answering Journalists' Questions³²

Why is it important to bring as many aspects as possible into development work?

In the past, development projects have been designed as rather mono-disciplinary. This has seemed appropriate for infrastructure projects for example

when the requirement seemed to be for engineering. Projects in social sectors accommodated more than one discipline in many cases, although it has been usual for health projects to be executed by health specialist, agricultural projects by agricultural specialists, and so on. But this is not the way humans or anything really works. Bridges do more than carry traffic; they impact the natural environment and may allow faster spread of communicable disease, for example. They also allow health and education improvements to be delivered more efficiently and improved labour productivity among other benefits. Looking at each intervention from as many aspects as possible allows an appreciation of more of these such impacts, and may even lead to a different type of bridge or location being seen as more suitable. This is how a new bridge would be considered in a development nation today, so why not in international development?

Why is it important also to consider spiritual and religious factors in our understanding of a project?

When a project is in a foreign culture, persons from outside will not understand the worldview of that culture. Today, this applies not only to Europeans working in poorer countries, but also to the Westernized persons of the country concerned. Conceptually it is similar to the rural-urban divide that develops in larger developed nations, particularly in the new world. Culture includes *spiritual and religious* aspects. The spiritual may include feelings of being connected to animals, the land or a place, of communing with ancestors or a range of other realities. This is illustrated by an example from an anthropologist's study of the Royal Thai Irrigation Department's program to replace village-made dams with concrete weirs.³³ Improved irrigation delivery and reduced water loss were clear technical benefits that in turn provided potentially higher rice production. But from the villagers' perspective, the concrete weir had done much more – it had changed the world. The traditional world had been one of acknowledging water spirits and protecting water sources through religious rituals, and in turn the spirits provided balanced rainfall and benign growing conditions. Dry or less suitable seasons were understood as the spirits having been offended in some way - perhaps cutting down trees in the sacred woodlot - and required rituals of appeasement, which accompanied correction to sustainable behaviours learned over centuries. The anthropologist titled his study from the words of a villager who said, *the spirits aren't so powerful anymore*.

We may explain all of the above as dark superstition that development aims to enlighten. But the environmental protection that was embedded in the traditional animism was also lost in the example above, simply because the initial development was seen solely as an engineering activity. This is a practical example of why understanding a person's worldview, which necessarily includes a spiritual and often a religious perspective, is important in development. Such a broad approach is called *integrated development*.

In addition, there is another reason for considering the spiritual dimension in development – a reason that is less likely to be accepted by many modern

Westerners. That is: spirituality pervades all aspects of everyone's life. We are not consistently rational and we respect certain fundamental values above the more transient values that pervade politics. Across millennia, sages from all traditions have observed that all persons cause dis-integration of their selves when they become narrow and single-minded about a pursuit. Since Danish philosopher Kierkegaard coined the description of existential angst as a characteristic of modern persons, it has become shorthand for describing our separation from nature and the traditions that once sought to celebrate union with nature. It is interesting at this point to recall that the word *angst* was cognate with *narrow* originally. Eastern religions have described this in other terms from the Axial Age³⁴ onwards, and the West's Christianity has the same concepts of integrity at its heart in terms of union with God. These are spiritual more than religious descriptions.

Is it important also to try and measure the effect of considering religion in the projects?

This question goes to the heart of a dilemma. Pragmatic project design and implementation will seek to define and measure whatever it can. By definition, pragmatism rules out spiritual aspects, which cannot be measured. But your question is of religion, which we may differentiate from spiritual aspects by defining it in terms of rites, rituals and beliefs. Some broadly based social scientists would call this culture, and understanding the culture of a client is as critical to the success in international development as it is to advertising in wealthy societies. Can this be measured? Perhaps retention of the accoutrements of culture can be measured by observation and survey, but I am not sure this is necessary. The success of a development project is in its durability in improving the overall lives of beneficiaries – not just one aspect of their lives and not just the aspects imagined by aid organizations. We may not be able to measure the intangible aspects, but we can try to ensure that we consider them during project design and implementation. I fall back on the sages of the ages who have defined life as myriad unknowable interactions - hence the *integrated* descriptor. It is the sages – geniuses in modern parlance – who first defined the word 'development' as the personal spiritual growth that leads to an understanding of how life works. To be effective in development, practitioners would first have developed themselves; to paraphrase Thich Na Han, *'if you want peace, be peace'*.³⁵

Conclusion

While there are critics of most of the institutional sources and approaches introduced in this paper, none detracts significantly from the overall theme of integrity. The SDGs are criticized by many, ranging from specialists who do not see their fields adequately represented, to The Economist magazine's description of the goals as *'worse than useless'*³⁶ and to engaged Buddhists claiming that the goals do not address poverty, which would *'require changing the rules of the global economy'*.³⁷ The World Bank and the UN have countless critics, as do the Church and other religious traditions. But the point is not to argue the merits of critics or vested interests – rather it is to understand them as part of integrated

thinking itself. Spurious as this may sound, it is an illustration of the process essential to understanding the diverse factors operating on all systems at all times. No doubt such argumentation will be labelled esoteric and nebulous, but again that is simply a reminder that integrated development is an ideal. It is an ideal worthy of our efforts as it represents the peaks of insight from our own and past generations. Ideals are the basis of all development aspirations, in poor nations as much as rich, and in personal lives. Integrated development is a culmination of our attempts to define our aspirations. In international development the journey has taken us through such other ideals as: the green revolution; rural development; sustainability; poverty alleviation; gender equity; resilience and so on, and through that we have arrived at an embracing vision that draws on all of our human abilities. That embracing vision is integrated development.

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