

Concept and Definitions of Development

Social and economic development as processes is inherent to a society right from its inception. However, the emergence of the concept of development is a recent one dating back to the early nineteen fifties. The post Second World War period and the period of decolonization witnessed the emergence and the dominance of the concept of “Development” in academic literature. The declaration of 1960s as the Development decade by the United Nations led to a burgeoning of literature on the concept. Initially development was conceived as an exclusive economic term referring to “growth”, “increase in per capita income” etc. But soon it was felt, development cannot be thought of in a onedimensional way having economic implications. It should affect the other dimensions of the society. Since then development became a sociological lexicon. Simply speaking development came to be interpreted as a process that is for the benefit of the society and only economic growth minus societal progress cannot be termed as development. Development thus stands for improvement in quality of life and conditions of living.

In general terms, “development” means an “event constituting a new stage or a changing situation”. “Development” is implicitly intended as something positive or desirable. When referring to a society or to a socio-economic

system, “development” usually means improvement, either in the general situation of the system, or in some of its constituent elements.

The concept of development though was not explicitly used, finds its essence in August Comte’s ‘Law of Three Stages’, in Herbert Spencer’s evolutionary theory, in Emile Durkheim’s ideas on the progress of society from mechanical to organic solidarity, in Karl Marx’s ideas on the progress of societies through different epochs and Max Weber’s ideas on the growth of modern capitalism.

But it was in the post Second World War period and the subsequent process of decolonization, the concept of “Development” got a momentum. During this period, the pro active role of the International agencies in assisting the war affected nations to rebuild their economies, the nation building process initiated by the newly liberalized countries gave a boost to the concept of development.

The word “develop” has come from an Italian word “voluper” meaning to unwrap or unfold. The definition of ‘development’ has been always controversial over time. As Thomas argues, development as a concept is ‘contested, complex, and ambiguous’.

“Although development has been a constant concern of governments, policymakers, economists and other social scientists – and has touched the

lives of more people than ever before – there has been little agreement on what constitutes development, how it is best measured and how it is best achieved. One reason for this lack of agreement is that dissatisfaction with the pace and character of economic and social change has instilled a desire to redefine the aims and measures of development.”(UNDP 1990, 104)

Development can be defined as the process of economic and social transformation that is based on complex cultural and environmental factors and their interactions.

Thomas (2000) explains three ways the word ‘development’ is used.

- **Development as a vision:** a vision or description of how a desirable society should be.
- **Development as a historical process:** social change that takes place over long periods of time due to inevitable processes. Here development refers to the unavoidable results of progress like agricultural to industrial society.
- **Development as action:** deliberate efforts to change things for the better and to ensure a better standard of living like providing food, education, health services etc.

To Prof. Yogindra Singh “Development is a strategy of planned social change which is considered desirable by the members of a society.”