The Centrality of Human Development in International Development Programs: An Interview with Courtney Nelson

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For over forty years Courtney Nelson was engaged in projects in Africa, Asia and the Middle East that were focused on trying to make a positive difference in the lives, work, and organizations of people confronting rapid change, new demands on themselves and their families, and worldwide economic and political forces that few understood. Courtney's integral perspective is evident here as he forges a clear presentation of the relationships among variables in development.

Human development tends to be an afterthought in the design of most development projects. The focus of interventions is likely to be economic development, institutional development, infrastructure development, etc., but the impact of the activities on the level of consciousness of the participants is a secondary concern.

Education is the high road to human development, but even education projects can fail to achieve significant advances in human development. Rote learning, for example, or training narrowly focused on work skills, can miss many potential developmental benefits.

My contention is that if economic, infrastructural, institutional, and educational interventions were designed with the human development of participants as a primary objective, the projects would be more effective and their benefits more lasting. To achieve harmony among the level of human development, complexity of technology, and management style, one would necessarily begin with the developmental stage of the intended workers. One would then select technology that was at the same level or one step above that level and design a management system consistent with the technology and the workers.

Once the three elements are in harmony it would become possible to manipulate policies (incentives), technologies (capital intensity) and human development (through training) to achieve sustainable development one step at a time. This, essentially, is what Singapore has done to create an advanced society with a highly advanced population in the course of a mere two generations.

Courtney Nelson

Q: *Your work history has been quite extraordinary in terms of just the years you've spent involved in development activities in Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia in particular. What experiences have helped shaped your perceptions about development?*

A: First of all, I am a generalist. Working in a discipline allows one to delve deeply, while being a generalist helps one have a broader view. The hard part is finding employment because organizations are generally looking for people in a disciplinary framework. I have been fortunate in finding a broad range of employment opportunities, but there were times I wished I had a definable, disciplined skill.

Looking back, I find that in one way or another I have had experience with the three main facets of the development process: organization, technology, and human development. Over time, through prolonged exposure, I felt these facets began to fit together.

At the beginning, I was working with a man named Lothar Metzel who was an East European immigrant analyzing Chinese communist pronouncements. At the same time, he was grounding me in Marxist and Leninist literature. The most influential book for me was Karl Wittfogel's ***Oriental Despotism***. Wittfogel was once the number two German in the Comintern in Moscow. After rejecting the Party he used Marxian analysis to study the ways in which the need to control water, either for irrigation or flood control, shaped a number of Asian societies. If a society needs to control water, it forms the kind of relationship between the state and people that can be leveraged for other activities. Only societies where you have such water control can you build massive monuments such as the Great Wall of China or the pyramids. Those achievements required the virtual enslavement of a lot of people.

Such despotic control over society was possible only because water control demands arbitrary organization. Decisions concerning water control measures must be made firmly by an authoritarian entity, they cannot be subject to discussion or debate. This is an extreme case of technology determining organization which, in turn, determines the level at which people must function. Once the mechanisms were in place for managing the technology, rulers could use their complete control over their subjects for building massive projects. Such projects could not be built in the West because, being well watered, outlying vassals could and did break from a kingdom and join the other side if the kingdom made repressive demands.

I found similarities between Wittfogel's theory of hydraulic society and Soviet ways of controlling their people. They used ideology rather than water control. They used the party line to control people at all levels of society. In a hydraulic society, the technology needed for water control enabled, and practically forced, a highly centralized political system, whereas the communist system was based on no such imperative and had to eventually fail.

Later, I spent a year working with state advisory committees to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. It was fascinating to see the different means chosen by these voluntary committees to deal with the specific civil rights problems of their own states. I met a great number of admirable people all over the country. Still, it wasn't international and I yearned to be back in the field.

I was fortunate to get an interview at the Ford Foundation. Frank Sutton, a sociologist on the Foundation's staff, was about to open an office of the Foundation in East Africa

and needed an assistant in that endeavor. The interview lasted a full day and I was dazzled by the people I met and their sense of mission in developing countries. At the end of the day I met with the personnel director to discuss terms of employment. I said I would go for the fringe benefits; I was so eager for the assignment.

Q: So you went to Kenya?

A: Yes, I had a two-year appointment, which became four years. It was a terrific learning experience because I was working for Sutton. Like Metzel, he was an able reference librarian on virtually every topic I took an interest in.

Q: What most interested you in Kenya?

A: East Africa has many fascinations. I got very interested in ecological research on wildlife and developed grants in all three countries: Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya. I even learned to fly so I could visit the research stations without devoting a week to each visit. This is when I began to get interested in human development. The Foundation necessarily worked with the elites of these countries. We were engaged in supporting economic planning, Africanization of the civil service, higher education, etc. We had one small project improving the school science curriculum, but our resources did not extend to the point where we could be productively involved in primary or secondary education.

Many of the people we worked with were outstanding. Tom Mboya and Julius Nyerere would have been leaders in any society. They had generally been educated, first at an elite high school, such as Alliance in Kenya, and then sent to Makerere University College for higher education. Many proceeded from there to study overseas. The gap between these people and the man on the street or in the field was enormous. One had the feeling that we were working on the surface of African society, while in the villages and countryside another generation was growing up with the same limitations as their ancestors for centuries past. Moreover, independence and democratization meant it became impossible to support the elite school system, so there was little chance to continue producing the admirable elite such as we knew.

Without much hope of doing anything about it, I tried to discover what made the great disconnect between the "been-to's" (e.g., been to England, been to the U.S.) and the others in their society. I became acquainted with John and Bea Whiting and Bob Levine, all social psychologists from Harvard who were undertaking field studies on child rearing in up-country locations.

A change occurred in the "been-to's" that was more profound than the knowledge that they gleaned from their studies. You would not recognize them as the people from whom you would draw your servant class, for example. They were very different people. One wonders how that can happen from the same population. I started reading child development books with guidance from Sutton, the Whitings, and Bob Levine.

Q: Human development, not economic or political development?

A: Yes. Their work fascinated me.

The Foundation decided to send me to Harvard after four years in East Africa. I went to what is now the Kennedy School, but was then the Littauer School of Public Administration. I was able to pick my program. While it was a degree program, the degree was less important than filling in the gaps of my knowledge, because my educational background had been very feeble. At Harvard I took a lot of development courses, economic and others.

I wrote a paper about Julius Nyerere's policy. Nyerere was the philosopher king of Tanzania. He was very personable and well intended—a very fine man without a corrupt bone in his body. At one point he took leave of his presidency and went into the countryside and visited small villages and towns. Then he paused in Arusha and wrote guiding principles for the government, which spelled out education policy, agricultural policy, rules governing the civil service, etc. An example of these principles is that farmers should not get help with their harvesting or planting, because that would constitute exploitation of the laborer. I wrote about his ideas on education, organization of government and things like that. They were well meaning, but many were unworkable.

There were only 100 college graduates and 1,000 high school graduates in the whole country when Tanzania became independent. Yet, Nyerere tried to set up a state-run system. The state machinery was pretty crude. As a result, it led to a lot of corruption and failure.

Somehow, David McClelland heard about my Arusha paper. He invited me to address a seminar he was running at MIT.

Q: Were you studying with developmental psychologists?

A: No, I was not working with psychologists at all. I was working with economic development people. I was, however, reading some psychology books, such ***as Stability and Change in Human Characteristics*** by Benjamin Bloom. It showed that the traits that differentiate among people can often be recognized in children as young as three. By age three the path ahead is already visible. That book was influential on me, because the Foundation and other development programs didn't pay any attention to people from zero to three. This was an area that nobody knew how to get to. It seemed to me that while we were working with the advanced, the elite, in countries like Kenya there was another generation of people—like those who we hired as servants—we weren't touching at all.

At that time I also read some work by Israelis who were concerned about child development in Kibbutzim. They were particularly concerned about the different cultural levels that seemed to be produced out of their European and Sephardic populations. The Jews from the Arab countries lagged behind the Jews from Europe.

They were trying to close that gap and so they did a lot of things with different kinds of interventions at a very young age. I think their focus was around age three. They had different control groups involving the Ashkenazi or German/Northern European Jews and the Sephardim, Jews of Spanish or Portuguese descent. There were some comparisons between Ashkenazi experimental and Ashkenazi control groups, as well as Sephardim/Sephardim, Ashkenazi/Sephardim experimental groups, etc. So they tried to figure out what was causing the difference. They found that by intervening and producing an enriched environment for the children, all of them advanced greatly, but the gap

between the experimental groups widened. That had a big impression on me because it appeared that so many human traits were established by age three.

Q: *Do you mean that the Ashkenazi still accelerated their learning or their development faster than the Sephardim?*

A: Yes, the Ashkenazi were even further ahead of the Sephardim, although both were way ahead of the control groups that had not had special interventions. That's a very puzzling thing because both of are Jewish populations. That doesn't mean their genetic code was the same, yet it was startling to see that even with extra attention, if everybody got it, the Ashkenazim progressed even further than the Sephardim. This seemed to imply that the book on stability and change in human characteristics was right—that people's potential was set by age three, the time they started on this Israeli program.

Q: *It seems like so many of our developmental programs and theories are built around the idea that anyone can be developed as much as they want to be. What you are suggesting is either the genetic or the environmental factors that we encounter are basically determinants of or set boundaries on that development. Clare Graves makes this point, as well as a colleague of mine, Mike Jay, who says, "Everybody can't be anything they want to be, but they can be everything they can be."*

A: The environment of the first two or three years of life is critically important. I think we often overlook those kids of very young age. In the Kibbutizim they were separated from their parents at a very young age.

Q: *Because they were raised communally, right?*

A: Yes. That's what puzzled them. They had the kids at a very young age, but still there were these differences and the differences would only grow. I still don't know the answer to that one.

Q: *I know you continued to have conversations about human development particularly among children when you were in Beirut and probably elsewhere. What I'm getting so far is that when you are talking about human development as it is among children. I read in one of your papers that this shifted to an interest in adult development.*

A: Yes. When I was in Beirut, I was convinced that the really important development occurs between ages zero and three. As I say, development agencies just were not having an impact on that level at all. Most of my budget was going into agricultural research, agricultural economics, and education. I was able to put little bits of discretionary money into a couple of projects that related to this idea.

One was a study in Oman of mothers' beliefs and practices. We got four Arabic speaking young women to go to Niswah, which was an interior village, spend four months and then move to Sofar, a village on the coast, for another four months. An anthropologist, a psychologist or sociologist from the University of Beirut, guided their methodology. A fairly massive study was produced out of that.

The reason that the intervention happened in the first place was that the infant mortality rate of the kids in Oman was 150 per 1,000. A UNICEF staff member, a Palestinian named Ali Othman, observed that the surviving children had little amulets hung on them in various places and he reasoned that the mothers probably thought those amulets were protecting their children from evil spirits. He came to me and suggested a study of this phenomenon. I funded it through UNICEF. It turned out later that UNICEF can't take that kind of money, but they took it then and used it to fund these young people.

The results were really quite extraordinary, because they demonstrated what the women believed. The child rearing beliefs and practices were just bizarre. They were doing everything they could think of to protect their children against the evil eye and the jinn, but they had no idea or concept of disease, the origins of disease or the importance of keeping a level of sanitation around the child. They were letting kids pick up stuff off the dirt floor and put them in their mouths. They didn't bother brushing the flies from the kids' eyes. In the schools there were about a third of the kids with obvious eye damage. What the mothers were doing was trying to protect the kids against the evil eye and jinn and not against the sources of disease.

It seemed pretty clear evidence that when one is going to intervene in a society at whatever level, one ought to know where they are. You start with the people you are trying to help and where they are in terms of their attitudes, beliefs and practices. Then start figuring out how to change it from there.

The government of Oman at that time—just after the new sultan Qaboos had overturned his uncle—developed the country just as fast as possible. But the projects did not involve the people. They would have big construction projects—airports and roads—but import all the labor from Pakistan and India, because there wasn't any trained labor in Oman. Teachers in their expanded school system were usually Palestinians who used European history books because that's what they had been taught. Even the agriculture research station was producing vegetables that only the foreigners would eat because the locals didn't have them as part of their diet.

The Omani officials said that they learned a great deal from this study about the children, but they would not let it be published because they found it too embarrassing for Oman that these primitive beliefs were so common. UNICEF was there to use the information in crafting their efforts in dealing with children, child development, and child mortality. When I went there 10 or 15 years later, the infant mortality rate had come down to about the level that it was in other Gulf states.

Q: How big of a drop was that?

A: It was from 150 per 1,000 down to around 40 per 1,000.

Q: That's very significant! This was done primarily as a result of this study through a shift in educational systems?

A: No. I don't know what UNICEF did with the study, but they knew that what they were dealing with was a set of very primitive beliefs. They needed to attack those beliefs and educate the mothers to the importance of disease if they were going to make any real dent

in it. Indian doctors staffed the hospitals; many of them couldn't even talk to the people who brought their sick in. Mothers had gone through all of the culturally sanctioned ways of dealing with the disease before they brought them to the hospital. Of course the mortality rate in the hospital was huge, because the children were already pretty far near the end when they arrived. UNICEF probably used this information. I'm not sure. They had it so they could start introducing basic concepts of disease causation.

After forty years in the field of international development, I have concluded that most development strategies are misguided. Human development should be the primary goal of the development process because advances of living standards, health, and knowledge can only be sustained when people progress up the scale of increased consciousness. At present, human development, when it occurs, is a by-product of efforts designed to achieve other objectives, such as income generation, health, environmental protection, institutional development, etc. These are all worthy objectives, but they should be pursued with the primary goal of human development uppermost in mind.

Courtney Nelson

Q: How does this link to your interest in adult development?

A: After this study, Ali Othman's wife, Saniyah, and I were talking. She had a year or so of college level psychology and said that she could produce a book for the mothers of the Levant: Palestine, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. Women in these countries had a higher literacy rate than those in Oman. They were much more cosmopolitan than the Omanis, who had been shut off from the rest of the world for a very long time. Saniyah produced a book called, ***Your Child Zero To Five***, again with a small grant from me to UNICEF. It became a best seller and went through at least four printings before I lost track of it.

Saniyah emphasized the importance of what happens to the child in the first years of life. The traditional beliefs were that you treated a child like a goat; you kept it healthy, but you didn't try to teach it anything. She was making the point that you need to be consistent in your behavior toward the young. You shouldn't use fear for behavioral control. You shouldn't lie to them. A doctor would say, "This won't hurt" and then stick a needle in the kid and he would jump through the roof. That had a predictable impact on the child's faith in what older people said.

Saniyah also included illustrations of where the baby grows in the womb. I was told that that was one of the most popular features of the book, because many women didn't understand that. For the women of the Levant this was pitched at the right level, because it was done by a woman from that surrounding.

Q: What were your next steps?

A: After Beirut, I did an evaluation of Foundation economic planning and management projects in Eastern Africa. Economic planning projects were usually a big success. The relative failures of management projects led me to realize that the institutions left by the British in East Africa were very often not compatible with the beliefs of the people who

were running those institutions after independence. For example, in Parliament a tribesman from the Luo tribe would get up and denounce some Kikuyu in the government for giving a fellow Luo a bad performance rating. They had the performance rating system, but it didn't take into account tribal identity, which was more important to them. Tribal morality was more important than the idea of public morality that the British had left. Economic planning, on the other hand, had less of a cultural flavor. In a sense, it was more impersonal than management that deals with interpersonal relationships.

So you have these dual moralities in the same system. This was one of the reasons the British institutions hardly ever took hold and lasted, except in India. India still has a parliamentary system and it's a real democracy. But in other places, British institutions came apart in various ways because they did not take into account personal morality. It was very different from public morality.

Before I left the Foundation, an economist from Harvard, who was running a study at Brookings on development and foreign assistance, tapped me to help President Carter, who was a new president at that time, do a better job of foreign assistance by understanding the problems. My part of the study became an appendix to his work. I was dealing with science and technology.

My assignment was technology transfer, but that was a little limiting. I came out of it with a proposal that a new assistance institution be set up which would work with scientists in developing countries who were at a fairly advanced stage. USAID at that time abandoned a country once it reached a certain level of income, except for Israel. Most of the intellectuals of many middle-income countries were trained in the United States. Then suddenly, boom, they were cut off from their U.S. institutions and were very unhappy about that.

It didn't seem to me to be in America's interest to just lose track of these third world scientists and technologists. The approach I recommended would cater to the middle-income people. It would be organized by field of expertise and would connect American institutions with overseas institutions. We went through a couple of years of planning that. Congress approved of the idea and then didn't fund it, so it died. That was the time when I focused more on the importance of technology in the development process because a lot of people were talking about appropriate technology at that time. It is a very important concept.

Q: *The issue of technology was something Gandhi talked about in India. That's where the whole anti-Videshi movement (resistance to foreign manufactured goods) under Gandhi's leadership emerged. He sought to promote simpler technologies through the Swadeshi movement.*

A: That's right. Gandhi's plan was to introduce simple technology that could be afforded and understood by the people who use it, for example the spinning wheel and weaving of cloth on traditional looms.

Q: *Yes, the spinning wheel is the symbol of it all. It's even on the Indian flag.*

A: That's a very important concept and I don't know that it made much of an impact in or out of India. I don't know how much people changed their development activities.

Q: *At least from a foreign USAID point of view, Americans continued to focus on bringing advanced technology to the third world. Is that a fair assessment?*

A: Yes, I think so. Considering the importance of technology, the notion arose that the technology needs to conform to the level of the people and needs to be appropriate to the level of the people.

Q: *When you say "level" of the people, what do you mean exactly?*

A: I think the concept of levels or stages as in Piaget's work. It is useful in considering, not only human development, but also stages of technology and organization. I can't define these stages precisely, but in defining interventions in a society it is useful to be aware that workers need to understand their technology and that management systems need to be consistent with the stage of the workers. Societies are also at various levels of development, as demonstrated in Michael Barnes' ***Stages of Thought*** (2000). This idea is based on the notion that people in all cultures go through the same pattern of human development. It is not cultural relativism. Japan and the Asian Tigers demonstrate that societies go through roughly the same stages of development, as do their workers. It is even possible for the successful Asian countries to borrow technology, management techniques, and training methods from the West, and vice versa.

In the Gezira, the colonial government of the Sudan of the 1930s took some nomads from the area around the conjunction of the two Niles and put them on a million acre irrigation scheme. They gave these nomads tenancies in the scheme. This was a great boon to them because they also provided education and health services. But after two generations these tenants were doing everything they could to get their children not to be part of the scheme, because it was drudgery. So at the beginning, it was a step up from semi-Nomadism. Then irrigation is commonly recognized as dehumanizing in the fact that you bump your head on the ceiling very early, because there is no room for individual decisions in the application of water. It has to be there when it's needed. The opportunity for individuality to be expressed is zero. That is one level to another, transformation from semi-Nomadism to irrigation. Incidentally, the Gezira Scheme has been recognized as a great success in many evaluations, but I have not seen the human development successes of the project mentioned. I think human development is the principle lesson of the Scheme.

Q: *When you're talking about development in this sense, you're talking about their orientation to modes of production or to education or what? How would you characterize that?*

A: The most persuasive example of the step by step development of a society and its people is Singapore. In Singapore, multinational corporations were invited in at Independence because of the cheap labor and the technology used was quite simple. But then Lee Kuan Yew, the president, put a lot of emphasis on education and training. He forced the multinationals to do a lot of training of their staff and gradually raised the minimum wage. This had the effect of raising the level of technology used because you had to have higher productivity of labor in order to afford to pay the higher wages. That

means the laborer had to be more skilled and more educated in order to use the more advanced technology and the wages had to be commensurate with the level of technology that was employed. I don't know what scale one would use to measure this process, whether there were stages or just a gradual change in the abilities of the workers. But after two generations, the Singaporeans topped the world in academic test scores and it enjoys a very high standard of living.

An important element in…human development …is the parallels between levels of human development, levels of organizational development, and governmental organization. That is another way of saying that as the modal level of individuals participating in organizations or societies increases, decision-making devolves downward in the case of organizations, and societies become more democratic, or at least they should for optimal effectiveness. The notion of a parallel structure ideally existing between modal human development and organization is not commonly found in social science literature, although authors like Ken Wilber, Dalmar Fisher and William Torbert have dealt with it to some extent. The implications of this…are that we should not be quick to apply our own standards of democracy and rights to other societies and cultures without understanding their circumstances.

Courtney Nelson

Q: *Are you familiar with Spiral Dynamics?*

A: I'm familiar with the concept, yes.

Q: *Are you really talking about a worldview shift as a sign of development, those worldviews based on one's orientation to self and to other, as well as the standards that one goes by? Standard may not be the right term. For example, we find in lower or earlier stages of development an orientation to personal power and that shifts into an orientation to community standards, rules, ideologies, religious beliefs and so on. This is a complex scheme, but part of what you are talking about is worldview.*

I remember in terms of development in India back in the early 60's, reportedly one of the first things young Indians would get when they started earning a little money was a pair of sunglasses. This of course, shifted their worldview. They saw the world differently through sunglasses. The next thing they would get is a bicycle or a portable radio. I can't remember the sequence of those two, but those were the three new technologies for personal use that they tended to acquire. Each of them, of course, altered their worldview, because with the radio you got music and news and information from a much wider area of the world while the bicycle gave you extraordinary mobility. So that is the kind of shift that I think of in early stages of development for individuals. Does that resonate for you at all?

A: Yes it does. That is very much what is going on. What is hard to do is to relate that to stages of human development and to prescribe what technologies fit what stage.

Q: *Maybe what we're talking about is a shift from pre-modern to modern.*

A: Yes, I think so.

Q: *Can we focus this more on the question of what became your view of the relationship between adult development and organizational and technology development in the third world?*

A: It was a gradual shift. In the mid-1980s I was sent to Indonesia by Harvard to work on a project for selecting and preparing Indonesians for graduate study in the United States. They were to study mostly management and economics. That led indirectly to my going back to Indonesia later to work for the official I had worked for initially. He had been promoted to Minister of the Cabinet. He ran the Secretariat of the President. He observed that the quality of personnel in the Secretariat was much lower than in the planning ministry where he had served before. He wanted me to think with him about what to do about that.

I talked to the department heads in order to find out what their units were doing, whether they made any regular written reports, and what they thought their units should be doing. After we did this investigative process, we decided that modern management is mainly about communications. Therefore, the communication skills of the staff were going to be increasingly important.

According to Presidential pronouncements the first 25 years after independence were devoted to internal development of the country and holding it together. The next 25 years would require that Indonesia be more international. Thus, foreign languages were important. A program was devised to teach English and computer use to 20 young staff members. After they successfully completed the English part, they were sent to Australia where they were given an opportunity to observe how the Australians do the same kind of functions that they were doing in the Secretariat. Then they were asked to write papers making proposals for improving the functioning of the Secretariat.

When those young people came back, the change in them was absolutely extraordinary. In the Indonesian culture, subordinates are not supposed to give advice or recommendations to superiors. These people came back with firm recommendations. They were articulate. They were just extraordinarily able people. They stayed together after that experience and, as far as I know, they are still meeting together. There was certainly adult development involved in this. I didn't expect changes to that extent would occur. It was very surprising to me that they were able to speak right up and weren't forelock-tugging, "I'll do whatever the father tells me to do" characters. They were people with their own ideas and not afraid to say them.

Q: *So that does imply a kind of shift in self-concept and a shift in worldview, as well as learning about cultures and systems other than the ones that they had traditionally been associated with.*

A: Yes—and giving them new tools.

Q: *And the new tools in this case were?*

A: Language and computers.

Q: This in turn affects worldview. Good. As a result of this, when you were thinking about adult development, it sounds like you were thinking about the existing culture, the technology or tools and the individual experience and capacity for learning; does that summarize that?

A: That's right. We weren't creating a revolution with these people, but we were giving them new opportunities and new learning so that they were able to put behind them the kinds of cultural limits that they had had before and to express their ideas. I'm sure they had ideas before, but were not encouraged or permitted to express them in most offices.

Q: Did this lead to a significant shift or effort on your part in trying to expand the way we were thinking about development to include human development?

A: Very much so. This experience was really very successful in my eyes and in the eyes of this Minister. He wanted to see if we couldn't spread this experience throughout the government so that people would get a new kind of retraining.

My ability to work with them was cut off shortly thereafter when Suharto was thrown out of office. The Minister went with him, so nothing happened after that. But these ideas about development and change also permeated a set of consulting assignments that I had from the United Nations Development Program. They had the task of sending out diagnostic teams to figure out what needed to be done to improve the civil service in various countries. They sent me to six countries, starting with Iraq, which was a real hoot.

Q: Why did you say that?

A: We were told when we went there that they didn't want our ideas on economic policy. We were there just to advise them on how to make their civil service more efficient.

Q: Was this under Saddam?

A: Yes. It was right after the Iran/Iraq War and before the Kuwait invasion. They had even abolished their extension service to the farmers. They cut off upward flow of information, so they didn't know what the farmers were thinking, what their possibilities were or anything else. It was "top down everything".

The people we talked to, except for the Ministers, were just scared to death. They saw no possible advantage and a lot of possible disadvantages in talking to us. It was clear that what they really needed was some way to express and to apply themselves more broadly.

People in the universities stayed in the universities and government stayed in government. We recommended things like having consultants to government from the universities and a year off for reflection for senior officials and stuff like that. We suggested better utilization of manpower and a different incentive system so that they weren't rewarded primarily for their loyalty, but they were rewarded for their accomplishments. We were able to say that kind of thing because we were from the U.N.

Most people would hesitate to say things like that. But we couched it well and one of the Ministers told us that he found our report very useful. But then they invaded Kuwait and forget about the rest of it.

In the quest of many of these assignments, it became clear that the transfer of skills and opportunities in the civil service was important, as was the notion that administration is a profession and not just a position. For example, Oman was going through the process of getting rid of the Indians, Pakistanis, and Brits in administration roles and replacing them with Omanis. But the Omanis didn't always understand that that meant they had to know something—not just have the power, but also have skills. Development administration was a skill that could be learned and taught.

Q: *This professionalization of the civil service that you're talking about is exactly the heart of what India was able to sustain from the British colonization—the Indian Administrative Service. That professionalism of the civil service was at the heart of much of India's economic and human development in terms of education and other programs related to social issues that they've had in India.*

A: Yes. They had a highly developed professional class at the top in the administrative service. They had patterns of communicating with one another. The idea of putting a minute or update on the file to capture and maintain information was deeply engrained. That wasn't deeply ingrained in countries that didn't have Britain as their colonial master. Many had oral cultures. That's what was in the President's office in Indonesia—an oral culture. They produced practically no paper.

In an oral culture people can change what they said before, so you have to be tuned in to what they are thinking now, not what they said before. There are a lot of reasons why a written culture is more efficacious, but getting that shift is a big challenge.

The other shift is from being loyal to an individual to being loyal to the service. In most of the non-British former colonies that I visited, the ministers were the heads of their departments in a personal sense. The people working for them were loyal to that minister. The idea of transferring from one ministry to another was not popular, because that would mean shifting one's loyalties. Even communication between ministries was a problem. It would get you nowhere, because the only communication that mattered was upward to the minister.

One of the things that I did in Indonesia and other countries where I was consulting was to try to open lines of communication between ministries, mostly through using computers, budgets and stuff like that. Thereby, the habit of communicating with other ministries became engrained and the loyalty of the person was to the service and not to the minister, whoever he happened to be. That communication thing is worth dwelling on for a few minutes because in Indonesia, they had the Dutch as colonial masters. The Dutch allowed very few people to get a higher education. When they got higher education, they didn't want them back in Indonesia.

Three professional groups emerged from different kinds of training. One group was the military. They were very important in Indonesia and even had economic roles. During the war against the Dutch, Ministries had to run economic activities in order to fund their own functions. The military group is probably the most powerful because they learned to do this well. The second group is the economists. They are also a clique, a very well

educated bunch. Most of them had advanced degrees from prestigious American universities. The third group was the technologists. There was an airplane engineer named Habibi who believed you could leapfrog in the development process and go right to the most advanced. Habibi was raised by Suharto, so he had special access to him.

Q: You're talking about leapfrog in terms of technology development?

A: Yes, in all senses: technology, education and what not.

Q: I don't understand the idea of leapfrogging in education development. Can you clarify that a bit?

A: Have a select group going to the advance levels of education such as Ph.D.'s, and engineering degrees. In other words, they said, "We are just as good as anybody else, so we'll take the leap and get them trained to the highest point and they will come back and work in our modern industry sectors," which was airplane building and ship building.

Q: So you mean developing a class of technologists and managers to accelerate economic and technology development?

A: Exactly. They were trying to apply the most modern technology to airplane development and shipbuilding. This was contrary to what economists were saying, because it was creating an island of plenty in terms of technology and money in a sea of people that has otherwise not changed much.

Q: It was still essentially an agricultural economy?

A: Agriculture and also the civil service, the merchant class and stuff like that.

Habibi got the money to start these really modern industries. They developed an airplane of their own design. The only customers were the military of their own country. They were customers because the president told them they had to buy from Habibi's industry. It was a huge waste of money, but it was also a distortion of the development process. You got these people who didn't think at all like the common Indonesians, they were modern men, transported into this elite environment. Modernity was the watchword.

Those three cliques communicated mainly internally. In each group, communication was easy because they knew the same terminology and they could trust each other. So there was an economics group that talked in terms that were understandable by any economist. The technologists had their own circle of communication related to technology. The military people had their own style of communications. There were barriers around each of these three groups.

Q: By barrier, you mean they would not communicate across the boundaries of these groups?

A: Yes.

Q: So the barrier could have been a social barrier or the various educational backgrounds these people had?

A: Yes.

Q: Were any of the barriers ethnic? Were all of these Indonesians as opposed to Chinese and that sort of thing?

A: No Chinese, but in some sense they were ethnic in that the Javanese ran everything.

Q: So all three groups were Javanese?

A: They were mostly Javanese, yes. The man I worked for happened to be from Borneo. He was of the economist group. When he got his promotion to be a Minister in the Secretariat, the chief economist told him, "Don't do anything for two years." He said, "You're the first non-Javanese and non-military person to hold that position." He was known as a good administrator.

Q: The barriers were essentially cultural and social?

A: They were professional. They talked the same language; they had the same value structure. The technologists couldn't understand why these dumb economists didn't want them to have the best aircraft industry and ship building industry that was possible. It didn't make any sense in economic terms, but the technologists didn't speak in economic terms. That is an extreme case where developing means of communication among ministries and among groups was an important step in the development of the whole civil service. You had these isolated blocks and you had to figure out ways in which information routinely circulated among the ministries to break down the barriers between them. That same kind of thing was apparent in Iraq, Oman, all of those developing Arab countries where they had the same deal: being loyal to the individual and not being loyal to the service.

Q: You're trying to show the link between the organizational, technological and human development processes?

A: Yes, that's right. It is clear that in designing projects foreign USAID agencies tend to be concerned with outcomes that may be economic, educational or technological. They may introduce new technology for cattle raising or something like that. They tend to be concerned with specific outcomes while letting human development come along behind. They would train the people needed for their particular project, but they didn't start with where the people are and design projects based on their needs. They didn't design technology within the understanding of the people they were assisting.

Q: It seems to me that in the history of developmental activity, at least on the academic side, if not on the practice side in the field, there has long been attention to questions of educational development, culture change, system development, technology, growth,

economic and political development. These have all been fields of study, fields of theory development. Presumably each has had some influence on practice in the field. What is the added idea that you are presenting in terms of the relationship between human development, technology development, and organization development in systems?

A: Designers of development projects should start with human development as a primary objective and then get into the technological, organizational and managerial implications of that.

Q: What would "starting with human development" look like? Would it be a focus on education such as the Indonesian example that you gave? Would it start with early childhood development or maybe all of the above? Is there a whole array of interventions that you have in mind?

A: It is all of the above.

Q: What are the kinds of human development interventions that you think are important for other aspects of development? Where would you start?

A: The human development objective needs to be primary in virtually all projects. When everybody became excited about environmental and ecological values, means were devised for project evaluation to include those values. The same thing could be done with human development. You would just evaluate what is happening to the people in the process of any project, and build human growth into the benefit side of the cost/benefit analysis.

Q: You've given examples where it seemed like human development was part of the evaluation in terms of changes in child mortality rates, the role of the newly educated people in Indonesia and that sort of thing. Recently in the ***Integral Leadership Review****, I published an article about a UNDP leadership program in Africa, Cambodia and five countries in the Caribbean. They found that as they introduced these programs among women in Cambodia, the incidents of AIDS went down. I would think that would be another example of the idea that human development really is an essential part of any kind of development activity.*

A: The message is that you have to start with where the people are, which is what we did in Oman. We started by finding out what the people thought and what they did. Too often, we would go in with the technology to improve health, but we don't get into whether the people understand what we're doing, whether they have any concept at all even of the nature of disease.

Q: Excellent. So this might apply no matter whether the projects were economic, technology or even a political development projects. You gave the example in Africa of the importance of the tribe, that starting there is essential and that too many of the U.S. programs and maybe the U.N. programs as well, have failed to start with an understanding of those beginning conditions?

A: That's right.

> ***The Society for Research in Adult Development (SRAD) is exploring ways to promote its field. If a foundation of virtually any size could be convinced of the importance of making human development concepts better understood, the evolution of the field could be planned.***
>
> ***-Courtney Nelson***

Q: How do you think the adult developmental psychologists can support the development of effective projects?

A: The best way is by starting with interdisciplinary projects. In other words, the psychological development community ought to be looking for other fields of endeavor where their concepts would make a difference. What I see now is people from other fields of endeavor occasionally tapping into stage theories of the psychologists, but they do it without participation of the psychologists. Bill Torbert is a wonderful example of somebody who has really gotten into the stage theory in his work on management. There are other people who have tried to use stage theory, but not very successfully.

Q: Another person who has been applying ideas of stage development is Don Beck. Examples include his work in South Africa at the time of the ending of Apartheid, more recently his work dealing with the issue of the Muslims in the Netherlands and working with both Palestinians and Israelis in trying to make a shift there. The reports I've heard from the Netherlands, as well as the history of what happened in South Africa, suggest that bringing that developmental psychology perspective—at least in the case of spiral dynamics, the Graves concepts—has been a very important piece in development. What you are saying is that in addition to understanding the economic, technology, political, organizational development things, we have to make sure human development is an integral part of any kind of change program in the third world.

A: That's right. I'm not familiar with what Beck is doing, but it sounds as if he's right on what I would think is the right path.

Q: I hope so because any initiative that can make a positive difference in the Middle East is welcome, right?

A: Yes it is, but that's a tough one. Another example of not understanding human development is Bush's notion that you can introduce Democracy everywhere. That's just stupid because it doesn't take into account how people think.

Q: So there are profound policy implications for the things that you are suggesting.

A: Yes.

Q: *What is your path for trying to communicate this to people who have influence on policy? Do you have any plans in that regard?*

A: I don't have plans. I'm not sure how one would do that. Introducing the concepts of stage change to different fields through research projects seems to be one way, but that's kind of a puny way to go about it. I don't know what the best way would be in other fields. It is so clear that introducing democracy in a place where people are going to vote by their sectarian identity and not on the basis of policies or personalities is just stupid. It's going to lead to the predominant ethnic group running everything.

Q: *Yes, or the predominant religious group as in American politics recently.*

A: Yes, we've taken a long time to get over—we may not be over it yet—but there were a lot of wards where if you weren't Italian, don't bother. The race card is still pretty important.

Q: *There are academic studies and studies that can be done by foundations in development projects and things like that. Is there anything else that we should be doing?*

A: Some work in retrospect is one way to go. You'd look at an intervention for whatever its purpose was and then try to figure out what its human development spin-off was. You might be able to evaluate or to rank projects on the extent they had left the participants and people around them better off in terms of worldview and stage of development. Even though that wasn't their main purpose, often you could figure out ways in which to design the project to achieve the same material objectives and also have a human development payoff.

Q: *Courtney, it's clear you've got just a wealth of experience that you've accumulated in your lifetime. Yours is a very important message on development and policy. I hope this interview will help promote that.*

A: I hope so too. I enjoyed talking with you.