

Introduction to *At the Root of Development: The Importance of the Human Factor*, a study published by Guerini & Associati  
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During the last few decades, the problems of development and international cooperation have been at the center not only of enormous interests but also of great passions and sincere, although sometimes naïve, enthusiasm.

As to what lies at the root of development, people with very different creeds and ideals have generated very different approaches. On one side, the humanitarian/religious approach believes that the development of a people is a long term process linked to history, faith, and culture. On the other side, the Leninist/Maoist approach attributes the roots of underdevelopment to colonialism and capitalist imperialism. Finally, a third approach is represented by the technological and economic approach of the United Nations and Western governments, which often tries to reduce the problem of development to mere economic growth which can be managed with the proper short-term projects.

As to international cooperation, there are different opinions on aid's actual effectiveness: the optimistic one, represented by Jeffrey Sachs (2005) who underlines the need to double the level of aid - is opposed by a more skeptic one (Easterly, 2001, 2006, 2009) who states that aid cannot "buy" development, and a completely negative one (Moyo, 2009) who thinks that aid is not only useless, but harmful.

After nearly 50 years, globalization and the fall of the Berlin wall smoothed over ideological contrasts by changing the scenarios and bringing new opportunities. However, what lies at the base of development still remains an open issue. The World Bank estimated that in the '90s, without globalization, the number of the so called "extremely poor people" (those who live with less than a dollar a day) would have increased, instead of decreasing by 150 million (World Bank, 2002). However, the expectation of a new era of peace and development was put on hold by global terrorism, regional wars, the oppression of new dictatorships, the interests of multinational corporations, the inadequacy of international organisms, the unstoppable environmental degradation, and the collapse of the financial world with the devastating worldwide crisis. Further, the problems of the poor populations are far from being resolved: material and spiritual degradation, social inequalities and violence, risk to increase also in countries which are increasing their Gross National Product. Finally, an entire continent, Africa, seems more and more at the margins of this development. Actually, several African countries experienced a decline.

Therefore, monitoring the effectiveness of development activities (above all of those which are put into effect through the instrument of international cooperation) remains a priority.

The purpose of this publication is to describe how development happens in reality, by showing 2 case studies. The first one is a classical cooperation project. The second one is the fruit of an educational journey made by a community of poor families in Brazil ("sem terra"), who have become progressively more aware of their own resources.

The first conclusion relates to the adequacy of the criteria which are at the basis of the various policies for development, and the effectiveness of their results. "The increase of productive factors (like financial and human capital) was less effective than expected. In order to generate a sustainable development it is not enough to provide some growth factors (be they economic or human) or revise some policy or procedures. Nor are "big plans" (which can favor a passive behavior) or a "laissez faire" attitude (as if people already knew already what needed to be done) sufficient.

The most important point is the personal growth of the individual, the true protagonist of the development process. In order for someone to change (with the related struggles that this change involves) he/she needs adequate aspirations, self esteem, and a somewhat stable social environment that would support such change.

All these factors may not be there during the formation process of the individual, but they may emerge in the encounter with different experiences.

It is, therefore, key that the development projects take into account the fact that, on one side, whoever is helped is not just the “receiver” of resources and, on the other side, he may be lacking the capabilities to grasp the opportunities which may emerge. Thus, in order for a cooperation project to be successful, it has to favor, in those who are helped, the rediscovery of the inner desire to build and improve their life conditions as well as to educate those capabilities that make the individual the true protagonist of any development.

This study shows two meaningful examples of this type of project. In both examples, the personal and professional involvement of people who were able to bring a positive and constructive attitude toward reality sparked unexpected capabilities and a new hope in the lives of those who were helped, making them aware of their own value, resources, and skills and, by so doing, truly involved them, from within, in the process of their own development.

Sociological concepts like alienation, social class, solidarity, are no longer able to generate any personal, entrepreneurial, or social initiative that could bring about a change. Only a relationship among people who are moved by ideals which respect every human dimension, who are both not afraid to bet on personal responsibility and to accompany them in time along an educational path can contribute to the generation of people who are protagonists and accountable. The numerous testimonies collected in this publication show a new judgment which put people and groups into motion: it shows how development actually “happens.”

At this point an objection may arise. If in the beginning and at the source of the development process the single individual plays such a key role, would it ever be possible to replicate activities and projects? The answer is yes, because the possibility of replication does not depend on methodologies or techniques which may be implemented irrespective of the personal characteristics of all the people involved in the project with a “top-down” approach. Rather, the possibility to replicate a development or cooperation project as described above, depends on the presence of people who are able not only to educate others to generate activities of common good, but also to welcome and nurture such activities wherever they may be born.

Therefore, the possibility to replicate cooperation projects and education is, in this way, rooted in the subsidiarity principle. This principle gives priority, for the pursuit of the common good, to initiatives which are born from the foundation of the civil society, leaving government the role and the task of supporting such initiatives more than creating them. The subsidiarity principle is founded on the irreplaceable value of the single person and of his/her freedom in acting in the pursuit of the common good. Therefore, respecting the subsidiarity principle means supporting freedom and responsibility of people and their relationships. Thus, the task of international institutions and their policies is recognizing and supporting, beyond any ideological barriers, those free initiatives which, as a matter of fact, work for the common good and real development. Policies and regulations do not create a people: they can, and should only help an already existing people to grow.