

The beginnings of modern development theory

OUTLINE

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Development paradigms or development economics (used interchangeably) have very few commonly agreed upon principles or guidelines. However, even before any cursory explorations of the issues are involved, one must first comprehend what development is and how it is acted upon. In this context, the word “development” is a complex word acting as a descriptor of growth in a variety of sectors such as economic, agriculture, and education, etc. Growth, however, is also a challenging concept in that it is also viewed differently among economists and observers alike. Sometimes the idea refers to goals and is economic in nature, while other times it may represent citizens’ social well-being. Of agreement among theorists, though, is the general notion that “development,” historically speaking, was firmly bound in the downfall of feudalism and the evolution of capitalism.

In this way, development can be considered as composing of three separate but interlinked aspects. First comes survival; this feature of any development paradigm makes sure the fundamentals of safety, shelter, food, and good health are provided. The second stage is concerned with raising the basic standards of living by creating more job opportunities, better education and awareness, and increased personal and by extension national income. The last stage is social in nature and is engaged with increasing personal and collective social choices. In summary, this skeleton view abridges current perceived wisdom of development

and further naturally hints at a continuum from underdevelopment to development. In the first aspect of the continuum, underdevelopment is used to describe the poorly educated or illiterate people of a nation who are essentially poorer and underresourced with limited options and choices. Such people can often be seen living subsistently in terms of basic food and shelter as well as financial and physical resources. This view can and has been extrapolated to the larger population, that is to say groups of underdeveloped people living in underdeveloped regions which in turn characterized by overpopulation, lack of productivity, poor technologies, and lack of equality in terms of general education and training, not to mention a comprehensive health system. Thus, it can be seen that the classic view of developing such countries means increasing gross domestic product (GDP) and structural transformation of the economy, which often entails reducing the reliance on the agricultural sector. This kind of development also entails strengthening socioeconomic diversification and differentiation and further stimulating wider social sophistication taking into account choice and equality. Other measures also include increasing national and global trade and fostering geopolitical relationships while addressing the above issues through good macroeconomic management. Further, healthy fiscal policies, and improved health care education, among numerous other variables are in play—all of which is predicated on a stable political government.

As mentioned previously, there are very few development guidelines; in this way many observers interpret what is needed differently. Some see the failure of underdeveloped countries to improve their economic and social standing as consequences of poor economic efficiency, lack of a stable government, market failure, tyranny, and corruption. Others see such failures as one of dependence. This latter view attempts to explain failure as a result of residual colonialism or external exploitation by wealthy foreign nations. This viewpoint also suggests an ongoing inequitable distribution of wealth through the inappropriate disparity of international terms of trade between the developed and underdeveloped nations, thereby taking advantage or dependency of the imbalance between the rich and poor nations.

Indeed, [Contreras \(1999\)](#) in his paper explored the gaps between the rich and poor nations during the period of the 1940s and suggested that by the 1950s the world would be divided into two camps: (1) the rich and (2) the poor. While the richer nations comprised, many Western countries including several from Europe, the United States, and Canada, etc., it was also suggested that the poorer nations were those in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. This duality of rich and poor nations was already known by many economists and social observers of the time and was discussed at great length and often times with great passion. Many too looked in earnest for ways of closing the gap between the richer and poorer countries ([Contreras, 1999](#)). Consequently, a branch of economic theory called development economics ended the default model or prevailing paradigm that aimed to address this imbalance. Essentially development economics fundamental principles aimed to address the poorer nations' economic imbalance with a view to increasing not only the prosperity of the country and its people but also the efficient allocation or reallocation of the country's resources ([Mikesell, 1968](#)). This involved creating or introducing new or improved policies that supported wide-ranging initiatives including cultivating educational expansion as well as better working conditions and health initiatives among a plethora of other sweeping changes in all sectors in an effort to create a platform for economic and social growth.

Development theory is firmly rooted in mercantile ideology and espouses nationalist economics, i.e., the control of the nation's resources at the national level. Indeed, [Mikesell \(1968\)](#),

an ardent observer, suggested that many preconditions would need to be in place before economic and social growth could take place. These included mobility in terms of the national workforce, increased and ongoing education, political stability, fair terms of trade, including economic freedom, and well-developed capital and financial markets (Mikesell, 1968). In Mikesell's view, he also saw humanitarian aid as an almost necessary means of nations gaining critical momentum to develop self-sustaining economic development. Of course, he suggested because of the inherent nature of many underdeveloped countries, any capital would indeed come from external sources (Mikesell, 1968). In fact, this is indeed what happened immediately preceding the aftermath of World War II. To a great extent, one could confidently argue that modern development economics was raised among a growing need for humanitarianism. In point of fact, many perceived challenges of the post–World War II Eastern European reconstruction programs suggested numerous authors such as Rosenstein-Rodan, Ragnar Nurkse, Kurt Mandelbaum, and Sir Hans Wolfgang Singer, to name a few, who recommended solutions of aid and structural transformation in unison to address the requirements of healthy economic and social development (Pleskovič and Stern, 2001; Meier and Stiglitz, 2002; Riddell, 2007).

Modern aid development theory and ideology emerged from such small beginnings and indeed several notable development models, as cited by Contreras (1999), have been used in various parts of the world at various times over the preceding years. Just a few of the many models that exist include structural change theory; linear stages of growth model; international dependence theory; and neoclassical theory (Contreras, 1999). It is beyond the purview of this book to go into any great detail of these models, suffice to suggest that development theory is a complex concept that acts as a focal point of growth within individual sectors such as economic, agriculture, and education, etc., or in macroroles as a growth model for whole countries or regions. However, having said that, the concept of increased development or growth in and of itself is also problematic to some in that it is viewed through various divergent lenses. By way of example some say developmental growth refers purely to economic goals, while for others it might also incorporate an important social aspect or advancement of the well-being of a population (Table 6.1).

From whichever lens one views economic and social growth, development can be thought of as three separate but interlinked stages. Firstly, one needs to consider survival; this entails obtaining sufficient essentials of food, shelter, good health, and protection against threats. The second stage looks to raise these basic standards and is concerned with creating more and better paid jobs and on top of this better education and increasing personal incomes. The third stage is occupied with increasing personal and social choices. This sums up current perceived wisdom of development and its attainment which suggests a natural continuum ranging from underdevelopment to development.

With this in mind, a so-called “developed” country or region is considered to be one, which usually (but not always) comprises a stable government; good macroeconomic management with healthy trade and fiscal policies; adequate infrastructure; increased education and literacy; good basic health; and personal security among other things. The notion of underdevelopment, by contrast, can be used to describe the poor, ill-educated, and under-resourced people of a region or nation. In such countries, one often sees people living subsistently with basic essentials of food and shelter taking up most of their financial and physical

TABLE 6.1 A selection of development models.

Structural-change theory	This particular theory came out of Latin America around the time of the 1940s. It focused on emphasizing the importance of opting out of the agricultural sector and moving employment into the industrial and service sectors. Expanding into these sectors would diversify their local structural economy making them more competitive and more attractive to foreign investment and by extension increase the local economy.
Linear stages of growth model	The linear stages of growth model was first articulated by W. W. Rostow in the 1950s; his ideas tended to focus on accelerated build-up of individual per capita income, which in turn will promote local and international economic growth.
International dependency theory	This theory is more of a reflection than a real development opportunity. It was a controversial contribution to development economics during the 1970s, which almost suggested that weaker economies would piggyback off their more developed counterparts. Fostering a sort of dependence, this theory postulates that such relationships are predicated on maintaining the status quo whereby more developed partners benefit more from their lesser developed counterparts by siphoning off economic benefits in a one-way direction.
Neoclassical theory	Neoclassical theory within developmental economics first gained distinction during the 1980s. It completely dismisses previous neo-Marxist (international dependence) theory as flawed and unrealistic. Instead, the theory promotes less interventionism favoring instead a truly free market uninhibited by excessive government regulation. This has quite possibly been the more influential of the development theories and has, in due course, perhaps become the more prevailing paradigm since the 80s (Contreras, 1999).

Compiled from the works of Contreras, R., 1999. Competing theories of economic development. Transnatl. Law Contemp. Probl. 9, 93–108.

resources of individuals. Moreover, underdeveloped areas/regions are all too often characterized as being overpopulated with low output or productivity; a lack of training and technology; and a general sense of inequality. In such situations, the classic view of development theory looks to achieve structural transformation of the economy through increased GDP; enhancing socioeconomic diversity and differentiation; increasing trade and geopolitical relationships; and engendering wider social sophistication encompassing integration, equality, and choice. Within this model though, as is quite often the case, the resulting structural transformation of the economy is typically coupled by a general decline in reliance on agriculture. While these are generalizations, it should also be noted that there are no real inside tracks to good development guidelines. In fact, development theory is, when one looks closely at the concept, at odds with each other in the sense that when dealing with underdevelopment, the debate takes several approaches. But in doing so, two common themes tend to resurface; these are the inherent and dependence of underdeveloped nations. When talking of inherent failures, it is easy to suggest that underdevelopment is a consequence of poor economic efficiencies. This suggests that resource allocation together with market failure is caused by, or at least exacerbated by, governmental policy failures and/or corruption and tyranny. The other increasingly common failing of underdevelopment is the notion of dependence. This view suggests that present inequality seen between the developed and underdeveloped nations can be traced back to external exploitation or colonization by wealthy foreign nations. This would have been further compounded by the inequitable distribution of wealth through an imbalance of the terms of trade between the rich and the poor.

While as a rule development theory advocates diversifying out of agriculture, the agricultural industry, nevertheless, remained a major sector in many economies. As a result, maximizing this sector became an important mechanism for achieving desired development objectives.

6.1 The growth of the agricultural economic development paradigm

So how has the twin track (mentioned previously) approach come about? Well, for decades now, science and technology have been at the forefront of the agricultural development paradigm. Yet, increasingly over this period, more and more investment for the research and development that lies behind such scientific and technological advances has come from the private sector (Pardey et al., 2006). Not so surprisingly, this investment has been concentrated in the richer developing nations. As more and more investment was channeled into research and development, new technologies were eventually rolled out; and naturally these new technologies often carried with them high research and development costs. As such, and with the need to provide a reasonable return on investments, as is the capitalist way, this meant passing on the costs to the customers and ensured the continuing high cost to consumers of such technologies.

Another outcome of this flood of private investment witnessed was more and more genetic modification techniques and outcomes being granted patents. This inexorable trend of bio-patents saw, and continues to see, an increasing amount of the biological stock being privatized. Once again, this ensured the exclusivity of intellectual property rights and increasing costs to consumers. As a result of the relentless march of the investment—commercialization—reward cycle, many were left unable to compete or pay; and many of these resided in the lesser developed world.

Clearly this places much strain on many small-scale or smallholder farmers in both developed and developing countries who increasingly find themselves in direct competition with capital intensive and frequently highly subsidized production systems that can produce vastly more commodities that are often sold more cheaply on the open market (IAASTD, 2010). Furthermore, the vicious cycle continues as these smallholders are unable to benefit from the increased global traffic brought about by the Uruguay GATT trade rounds. Added to this, the high capital entry barriers of some industrialized farming sectors effectively result in a de facto form of international trade protectionism that precludes any democratic involvement from the small players.

This ensures the brutal and steady decline of local food production systems (Gibson, 2016). It is also a situation that is unlikely to change in the short term either, that is, unless a more significant reduction in trade barriers (subsidies and import tariffs) is vigorously pursued and the negotiating position of the developing countries is properly strengthened.

Unfortunately, while there are many proponents of a true economic level playing field, to rectify the situation, the author feels, is a mountainous challenge and one that will take years to address. This state of affairs ensures that for many, if not most countries in the world, agriculture has become an essential and inextricable component of economic growth. Incidentally, this is a situation that is also tied to the food security of many developing countries

(more on this later). Having said that, though, it is wise to note at this juncture that while for many, the current agricultural paradigm is one of the industrialization and concentration there is growing backlash at a production system that is increasingly seen as socially and environmentally destructive. The difficulty here is one of consensus, with alternative models provoking as much disagreement, and with many loud and vociferous advocates of each, the debate is set to continue into the foreseeable future. Unfortunately, this fractious and dogmatic posturing by many opposing camps can be seen at best as unhelpful and at worst damaging to any real structural consensus. Alongside, the agricultural paradigm is not the only model that is being challenged, indeed there are many other competing economic and developmental models to those currently in service but that is another matter.

6.2 Development in practice

Whether centrally planned economies responsible for controlling the production of food or whether supply is met via the global free market system (globalization) or whether in combination, a country's food supply is no accidental undertaking. It is the government and its respective views on such matters that shapes the developmental landscape. With policies of international or national responsibilities looking to promote free trade, self-sufficiency or other instruments of business defines the way a country's or region's food supply is shaped.

Regarding agricultural development paradigms there is far from agreement on just how agriculture fits in with a country's or nation's overall development agenda. Indeed, agricultural paradigms have shifted, sometimes quite radically over time and spatial boundaries. Following post-World War II for instance, structural rebuilding, the prevailing agricultural development paradigm of the time, was to increase productivity—allowing for the security of food as well as any associated benefits of economic growth to naturally filter through the economy and back to the ordinary person (Goodrich, 1947). This, it was thought, would be achieved through a combination of suitable infrastructure; technological innovation; improved institutional frameworks; a good information network; and the right incentives.

The idea of enlarging a country's international agricultural trade as a tool of development at this point had not yet fully emerged. Instead, protectionism and quotas were still seen as legitimate policy instruments with imports supplying any food shortfalls (Goodrich, 1947; Warnock, 1997). This view forced inward facing national policy objectives and a paradigm of self-sufficiency toward food production (Warnock, 1997; McCalla, 2007, pg16). However, change brought about by the Bretton Woods Institutions aided in the formation of international frameworks, which eventually helped open global markets for new and existing training partners in terms of goods, services, and capital. On top of this, the same institutions aimed to create stabilization through outward looking program of advice and monetary assistance. This modernized Western agricultural development practice helped shift insular looking nations to face a more global perspective with the resultant notion of international agricultural trade as a growth development tool gaining traction (Belshaw, 1947). This introduced fundamental radical changes in the way farming was seen; self-sufficiency was slowly being replaced with cheaper imports where comparative advantage became the underlying agricultural philosophy. Developing countries too were encouraged to follow the Western

model, and while some adopted the new philosophy (to lesser and greater extents), the now familiar industrialized agricultural model was firmly cemented in the mix of other development strategies. Through this growth and the subsequent occupational redistribution of farm workers, it was hoped developing countries would be able to help themselves in food security while also reducing wealth gaps throughout the world (Belshaw, 1947). This model became very successful in the West; however, it had mixed successes in the developing regions with many failings to properly adopt the full ideology. Despite some stragglers, by the late 1980s, the global free market had firmly taken hold and countries, building on the model of comparative advantage, were encouraged to export whatever they could produce most efficiently. In turn this allowed them to earn the foreign exchange needed to import any required food shortfalls. This became the standard development model with the agricultural sector finally seen as having a valuable role to play in the overall strategy of both the economic and social development of a country or region. In this scenario, McCalla (2007) suggests the agricultural sector:

...becomes much more complex, more interdependent with the rest of the economy and charged with meeting multiple goals. [Where] Increasing food production is no longer a goal in itself. (McCalla, 2007, pg16).

However, while in many economies' agriculture has been liberated and aligned with the ideology of global free trade, in others a protectionist approach continues to prevail.

6.3 Globalization

The march of globalization has been relentless. For two, arguably three centuries, advances in media, travel, and technology facilitated by conducive politics has resulted in the relative ease of movement of goods and services across the globe (Gibson, 2016). However, within this context food is a relative newcomer. In fact despite the overt political will that has been bandied about since the 1940s or so it was only by the 1990s that the General Agreements on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) talks was food was finally admitted into the global free trading arena. In theory this effectively allowed countries to buy the food they needed at the best price on the international market unimpeded by economic or political barriers (caveats aside). That said, globalization has brought about economic and cultural liberalization as never before—a new orthodoxy (Vaidya, 2006). Much of this, according to Kennedy et al. (2004), is being spurred on by urbanization and as far as the food is concerned is effectively transforming the whole food supply chain from production, processing, retailing, and marketing through to consumers all around the world (Kennedy et al., 2004).

There are many other benefits of this new global market too. One such benefit has to do with livestock and quality control standards. In dealing on the international market, for instance, bound up within increased global trade is a trend for better quality control standards within the meat and livestock sector. Inherent in this upward trend also exists the possibility of translating such coveted standards into better animal welfare values and by

extension the potential of reducing disease and increasing food safety. There are also economic and social benefits of globalization too—as societies are becoming increasingly politically and culturally integrated, so the increased flow of commodities services, labor, and capital means more opportunities for many more individuals and countries. Consequently, greater international trade often raises domestic incomes and standards of living, helping both the financially poor and with improved food security (Parfitt et al., 2010).

Global trade in food and agriculture also brings with it its own challenges. When it comes to animals, for instance, the same strict quality controls that look to raise standards might also act as barriers. Also, when it comes to a finite food supply and with so many countries now looking to be fed from the same trough, the many global inequalities in terms of trade are potentially set to increase with certain established interests looking to benefit considerably more than others. Furthermore, on a political dimension, the FAO, Parfitt, and others also warn that with increased integration and a potential converging global agrarian policy, the rewards might come at a high price as reflected in the increased vulnerability of global production, the lack of development of internal markets, and subsequent price volatilities (McMichael, 1994; FAO, 2003; Parfitt et al., 2010).

Another cautionary note too, says Kennedy (2004), concerns the vast amounts of direct foreign investment by large multinational food companies as well as retailers. While no doubt this investment is resulting in cheaper food, greater availability, and more diversity—such “advances” are inducing fundamental changes in traditional production, procurement, and distribution systems often, suggests Kennedy, at the expense of smaller local agents and long-established food outlets. Moreover, as international trade tends to favor big business and centralized procurement systems, it further acts as an exclusionary hurdle to small-holders or small producers (FAO, 2005).

Lastly, there also appears to be evidence that globalization is likewise bringing about a gradual shift—a convergence—toward a more universal food culture (Kennedy et al., 2004; Dimitri et al., 2005; Scheuerman, 2008; Walker, 2008).

Another important driver of change within the food supply dynamic is increasing urbanization—a trend that is only going to continue.

6.4 Right to food

There are many whose misconception of the morality of the right to food is enshrined in the declaration of human rights back in 1948. Yet, the concept, despite what others would have us believe, had its inception scattered throughout history (Mettrick, 1929; UN, 1948; FAO, 2006; Gibson, 2016). In point of fact, even back in the day of the Babylonian empire, even slaves had the inalienable right to food despite undertaking “service without pay” (Johns, 1904). Another example of this apparently relatively new social construct saw the Rev. Thomas Sherlock, Bishop of London, back in the early 18th century, incorporating the English philosopher John Locke’s notions (1714) when he opined that:

“There is not, I presume, a stronger natural right, than the *right to food* and raiment; this is founded in the common necessity of nature; and ’tis not to be thought that God sent men into the world merely to starve, without giving them a right to use in common so much of it as their necessities require.” (Sherlock 1718, pg25).

Expanding on this idea was Edmund Burke's book in which he comments on the role of governance when reflecting on the French Revolution in 1790 when he wrote:

Government is not made in virtue of natural rights, which may and do exist in much greater clearness, and in a much greater degree of abstract perfection: but their abstract perfection is their practical defect. By having a right to everything they want everything. Government is a contrivance of human wisdom to provide human wants. Men have a right that these wants should be provided for by this wisdom ... What is the use of discussing a man's abstract right to food or to medicine? The question is upon the method of procuring and administering them. In that deliberation I shall always advise to call in the aid of the farmer and the physician, rather than the professor of metaphysics. (*Burke 1790, pg88/9*).

Of note here is Burke's separation of the moral right to food to one of the adaptations and practicalities of attaining a person's right to nourishment, it marked an important milestone in regard to the departure of contemporary doctrine.

Separately, in a relatively similar vein was the influential secularist of the 19th century—Charles Cockbill Cattell who also strengthened the idea by unequivocally stating that:

Every industrious community has the right to food, clothing, shelter, and such social arrangements as will enable it to enjoy an average share of life. (*Cattell 1874, pg10*).

Last but not least, in the writings of Boyd Orr, one can witness a further drive in the direction of the right to food; in 1939, talking of the virtues of the comparatively new science of nutrition he suggested that

It is the right of every citizen ... to enjoy the benefits ... of nutrition so that the health of every one ... will be up to the level we now know is possible. (*Orr 1939, pg80, Orr 1940*).

With the moral momentum providing impetus from these men of foresight it is undoubtedly a feather in the United Nations Human Rights Commission, driven by Eleanor Roosevelt when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was drafted in 1948. Indeed, it was the first time throughout history that an international body actually recognized food as a right. Yet, despite these promising beginnings, it was not until the World Food Summit 1996 that the right to food was officially preserved in legislation (*World Food Summit, 1996*). Even this had its limitations, though, as it was not till a decade later that the moral and ethical human rights dimension of the ideology was finally realized (*FAO, 2006*). Yet all was still not quite fully in place, the reason being, despite the fact that the right to food was now fully accepted in over 40 countries worldwide, hunger and malnutrition was still rife and rising, even before the 2007/9 economic (and food) crisis highlighted the problem that for many, the right to food was at best inadequate (*FAO, 2006; SOFI, 2009*) and at worst:

... a cruel mockery to tell someone they have the right to food when there is nobody with the duty to provide them with food. That is the risk with the rights rhetoric. (*O'Neil 2002*).

It has been further suggested that despite the guidelines on how best to anchor a rights-based ideology in the fight against hunger and malnutrition, a fundamental lack of cohesion

betwixt and between policies ensures that any real coordinated change or progress is difficult to achieve considering that such frameworks are based on voluntary rather than mandatory codes (Hartmannshenn, 2004; UN, 2004).

6.5 Questioning agricultural free trade

In playing devil's advocate, there are some important caveats that have been expressed in the current model of global free trade vis-à-vis food and food security. These concerns surround the fact that common in the free trade paradigm and contrary to much of the postwar government-managed market economy is the notion that global trade would naturally grease the wheels of development. However, critics have argued, scathingly in some instances, that this belief is wholly and inappropriately misplaced. Instead, some have suggested relying on the private sector to replace those important functions that had been previously provided by governments, which resulted in more food insecurity rather than less (Murphy, 2010). This view gained further credence in the 2007 World Development Report that essentially acknowledged this very shortcoming and sure enough; following on the heels of these concerns was the 2007–08 food price crises which saw widespread civil unrest. These developments firmed up the realization in policy-maker's minds of a basic need to manage the inherent volatility in global free trade markets and to further protect people from volatile food costs. This view marks a shift from the laissez-faire, free market mechanism of free trade and a return to a more cautious approach with some promoting increased government managed intervention and social safety nets (Murphy, 2010). From such developments, another emerging paradigm emerged to challenge prevailing trends in development economics—that of food sovereignty. The idea of food sovereignty marks a departure from the hitherto large-scale intensification of agriculture and a liberalized trade-based food security model toward more localized, small-scale sustainable solutions (see Politics of Food) (Windfuhr and Jonsén, 2005).

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