

Kande Mutsaku Kamilamba* & Mariana Castro Álvarez**

The NGOs of Development in the South: Neo-liberalism's Instruments or Popular Alternatives? A Critical Approach to the Third Sector***

THE WORLD BANK and the International Monetary Fund, both financial world organizations of great prestige, see NGOs as efficient agents in the fight against poverty. The channeling of private and public help for development does not seem to have any other way to reach its destination, and this is what caused many NGOs to think that they were the spearhead of organized civil society and at the same time to facilitate their proliferation in the world. They seem to be mushrooms that can be found in every corner and are turning into a *modus vivendi* of several intellectuals and political fighters tired of activism. Today, the so-called humanitarian organizations do not escape the market's logic and, instead of being its critical eyes, they are turning into instruments at the service of governments, instruments of the prevailing economic model, facilitating the privatization of certain roles that the state should play. In certain circumstances, they have played a supporting role in the disappearance of popular movements by occupying their political spaces and by depoliticizing several demands of the nonconformist sectors.

To illustrate and justify our position, we are going to look at the experiences of some NGOs related to development in Asia, Latin America and Africa.

To understand NGOs, we must realize that the concept of social capital is still in process of completion.

The World Bank has included it among the following basic forms of capital: natural, constructed, human and social. Numerous studies have shown that it is necessary to have social cohesion for societies to have economic prosperity and a sustainable development, a reason why it is important that there exist an adequate unity between social capital and the NGOs.

The aim of this paper is to bring a new view of development organizations in the Third World. First, we will look at what development is, and then cast a critical eye over the way in which this has been the object of the studies and work of the NGOs.

Issues concerning development¹

Even those who were opposed to the capitalist strategies of the moment found themselves obliged to express their criticisms in terms of the need for development, through concepts such as "another development", "participating development" and "socialist development". The relevance of development and its necessity was not in doubt. Development had turned into a certainty in social thinking. It seemed as if it was impossible to describe social reality in any other terms.

Reality had been colonized by the development discourse, and those who were dissatisfied with this state of affairs had to fight within the same discursive space for degrees of freedom, with the hope that on the way a different reality could be constructed. Examples of these efforts are Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), the birth of the theology of liberation during the Latin American Episcopal Conference in Medellín in 1968, and the criticism of "intellectual colonialism" and economic dependence of the late sixties and beginning of the seventies. The most acute cultural critic of development has been Ivan Illich (1968, Conference on Inter-American Student Projects).

To see development as a historically produced discourse requires an inquiry into the reasons why so many countries had to start considering themselves underdeveloped in the period immediately after the second world war; how "to develop" turned for them into an essential problem; and how they became involved in the task of fighting their condition of being

underdeveloped, yielding their societies to more systematic, detailed and extensive interventions.

According to Ivan Illich, the perception of the foreigner as someone who needs help has successively taken the forms of the barbarian, the pagan, the disloyal, the savage, the native and the underdeveloped.

The study of development as a discourse is similar to the analysis by Edward Said of discourses on the East, in the sense that, like Orientalism, the policy of economic development has been and continues to be a Western style of domination, restructuring and authority over the Third World. However, it is mainly a representative regime, an imaginary one made for imperialistic capitalist interests. In contrast to Said, Arturo Escobar pays more attention to the display of the discourse through its concrete practices of thought and action through which the Third World is actually created. Moreover, he establishes that the policy of economic development is not a one-way road, but that there are also forms of resistance by people of the Third World against development interventions, who fight to create alternatives with which to be and to do.

He also takes ideas from authors such as the African philosopher V. Y. Mudimbe, who in his book *The Invention of Africa* shows that the Western discourse employed to tackle the knowledge of what Africa is reinterprets African history from its outward appearance, weakening the very notion of Africa. In this way, Asia, Africa and Latin America's representations as "Third World" and "underdeveloped" regions are inherited from an illustrious genealogy of Western conceptions about those parts of the world.

The West had begun to live as if the world were divided in two: a field of mere representations, and a field of the "real". An objective and empirical position that pronounces that the Third World and its people exist "outside there", to be known by means of theories and controlled from outside.

Because of this, we consider the context of the development era within the global space of modernity and especially from modern economic practices. From this perspective, development can be seen as a chapter of what can be called the "anthropology of modernity", that is to say, general research concerning Western modernity as a cultural and historic specific phenomenon. To treat Western cultural products as "exotic" so as to be able to see them the way they are.

The analysis of the discourse of development started in the late eighties. However, a few works have broached its deconstruction. For example, James Ferguson studied the development in Lesotho and questioned the productivity of the apparatus of development. Another deconstructive approach (Sachs, 1993: 6) analyses the main concepts or key words of development's discourse, such as market, planning, population, environment, production, equality, participation, needs and poverty. The aim of our paper is to disclose the concepts' arbitrary nature, their cultural and historic specificity, and the dangers that their use represent in the context of the Third World: an unfinished task that NGOs have neither faced nor taken into account. Therefore, the question that arises is whether their aim is to deepen the analysis or to be only useful palliatives, like aspirins to alleviate the symptoms.

One of the many changes that took place at the beginning of the second postwar period was the "discovery" of massive poverty in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The warlike discourse against fascism moved to the social field and to a new geographical territory: the Third World. A new war against poverty was now undertaken. The new emphasis was stimulated by the fact of the recognition of chronic poverty conditions and social malaise that existed in poor countries, and the threat that this represented for the most developed ones.

The United Nations estimated that the United States' per capita income was of 1,435 dollars in 1949, while in Indonesia it scarcely reached 25. This led to the conviction that something had to be done before the instability levels in the whole world became unbearable.

The conceptions of poverty were quite different before 1940. In colonial times, concern regarding poverty was conditioned by the belief that, even though "natives" could become a bit enlightened through the presence of the colonist, much could not really be done to alleviate their poverty, as their economic development was hopeless. Natives' capabilities in the sphere of science and technology, the basis of economic progress, were considered to be nil.

The treatment of poverty enabled society to conquer new territories. The administration of poverty demanded intervention in education, health, hygiene, morality, employment, the teaching of good habits of association, saving, bringing up children, etc. The result was the creation of a new field: "the social", a privileged sphere for the birth of NGOs. This concluded in the XX century with the consolidation of the welfare state and the set of techniques grouped under the name of "social work".

It had been created a separated class constituted by the poor. But the most significant aspect of this phenomenon was the establishment of an apparatus of knowledge and power dedicated to optimize life, producing it under modern and "scientific" conditions.

In this way, the history of modernity is not only the history of knowledge and of the economy: it is the history of the social. The history of development involves the continuation in other places of this history of the social.

When in 1948 the World Bank defined as poor those countries with a per capita income lower than 100 dollars, almost by decree, two thirds of the world population was transformed into impoverished individuals. And if the problem was insufficient income, the solution was economic growth. It was in this way that poverty became an organizing concept and the object of a new problem. As every problem, that of poverty created new discourses and practices, among which must be mentioned the birth of several NGOs, which gave shape to the reality they referred to.

The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development carried out economic missions, visiting underdeveloped countries to formulate a general development plan.

In the reports of the economic missions there stands out the discourse of the messianic feeling and quasi-religious fervor expressed in the notion of "salvation": to "save" the underdeveloped country with neutral, desirable and universally applicable tools. Before development, nothing existed: "dependence on natural forces" did not produce the most felicitous results.

When approaching non-governmental organizations, one finds oneself at a crossroad where the diversity is such that it is not possible to know for certain which way to head. In fact, their definition, instead of being positive, is posed in negative form. They are non-governmental organizations at the service of development in the South of the planet. Their main characteristics are, or should be, the following: independence of the state, that is to say, not belonging to the state's structure (note that saying that they do not belong to the state's structure does not tell us anything about their internal criterions of organization or about the external criterions of their functions); they are the government's critical eye which didn't manage to constitute a response to the needs of their population; they are non-profit organizations, that is to say, "altruistic"; they receive their resources from donors and not from governments.

The growing increase in the number and not in the quality of development NGOs in the world is a sign of the importance that this issue had acquired for those who still lived in the expectation of emerging from a situation of poverty and destitution. And as if this were not enough, in and by themselves, there was conceived the idea that they were a spearhead of civil society that now was indeed laying the foundations that would serve for the development of the countries of the South.

The failure experienced in North-South relations set more than one person to think that NGOs would be a viable alternative for obtaining the support of the North for the South and that this would facilitate to improve the situation of those most in need. From this viewpoint, many organizations, fund suppliers and people worried regarding development in the South offered NGOs their help, although at this moment of evaluation appears more like a way to restrain rather than a course to attain development in the South. International organizations such as the World Bank and the regional development banks (BID, BAD) as well as several western governments turned into real sources of cash for the NGOs. This forces us to say that, today more than ever, it is necessary to see NGOs with an universalizing glance, that is to say, to carry out an analysis of their presence and activities on the basis of the social relations established between the North and the South and to avoid seeing only the aspect of their development activities detached from the intentions of their donors. This is a fact that the NGOs themselves refuse to accept as happens in the case of Africa, where nobody is able to know who their real donors are.

Our analysis would have several levels. The level of intentions, that is to say, the NGO's volunteers' aims; the level of the collective conscience wherein lie the aims of the NGO; the level of the NGO's social functions and their dimension; and the level of institutional logic.

With regard to intentions, we must say that NGOs always manifest a serious and firm concern for the development of the countries of the South and their resolute intention to help them to emerge from the situation in which they are. When one visits any NGO's website or when reading their foundation documents as well as their original intentions, one is always astonished at the altruistic nature with which they were instituted. However, as is said in Mexico, talking is not the same as actually doing. The performance of these NGOs in the countries of the South brings into evidence a contradiction between the writings and daily experience. Several NGOs have existed for decades already, and their impact on reality is, in the best of the cases, insignificant.

As for the level of the collective conscience, it is important to emphasize the culture from which the NGOs emerge. They are part of the culture of the societies in which they are born. There is a certain view of development in these cultures that the NGOs are in charge of taking to the South. This conception, as we have seen in recent years, links development to democracy and human rights. They thus emphasize elements that, being implicit in their culture, turn into universalized values for the achievement of their objectives though they do not appear explicitly in their intentions.

Regarding the level of their social functions, we can state that the NGOs, starting out from this culture and with these non-explicit appreciative elements, may become generators of conflicts in some societies of the South. In some cases, by not taking into account the existing inequalities, they may be a factor of consolidation of the status quo, or cause the strongest to turn into a more united class. Such is the case of the *food for work* program in India.

The so-called humanitarian NGOs have always worked on the solution of populations' immediate needs. That has also contributed to maintain reality as it has always been and have led governments, more and more, to pay no attention to their duties, a fact that neoliberalism not only salutes with pleasure but also promotes. The fact of their being present in the countries of the South and working towards easing the situation of the poor, also leads the population to leave aside their pressure on the government and be content with what the NGOs can give them. This contributes little to the creation of the population's critical conscience and does little to help the political culture of these areas of the South.

Finally, we must bear in mind that NGOs are not only oriented towards helping the needy but must also assure their own continuity as an institution and supplier of employment in their countries of origin as well as in those in which they work. At this level, we must try to carry out an ethical judgment related to the culture of the NGOs in the world. The insistence that we have seen in the last years regarding the NGOs' professionalization leads us precisely to question the weight of the institutional logic in their bosom.

Social capital: a possible alternative for development of the South?

What is social capital? There is not a definitive answer to this question. This may be one of the reasons why the term has been devalued, by being used as a banner by Non-Governmental Organizations to justify their lack of seriousness and commitment towards their community. Just as an introduction, we are going to talk about the "social capital's" history and the process that has characterized it from its invention to nowadays.

It is possible to trace the idea of social capital already in Alexis de Tocqueville (2001: 40), Emile Durkheim (2001: 40) and Max Weber's (2001: 40) investigations. In 1916, Lyda J. Hanifan made the first reference to this term within the context of education and local communities². It has been used since then by several authors, such as Jacobs (2001: 40), Luoury (2001: 40), Coleman (2001: 40), Putman (2001a: 40) and Fukuyama (2001: 40), among others, in their analysis related to labor markets, human capital and the relations of the nation-state.

Bourdieu and Passeron (2001: 40) decided to investigate social capital starting from cultural capital. According to them, cultural capital is the set of resources that reside in families in which

individuals have a particular social status, while share capital refers to the resources gained through social ties, network members and arising from shared norms.

Some authors like Abramovitz and David (2001: 40), Omori (2001: 40), Hall and Jones (2001: 40), among others, decided to unite the concept of social capital with macro institutional issues, referring to the new term as “social capacities”.

Temple (2001: 40) mentioned that social capital is a term assigned to those social aspects that are difficult to measure and to incorporate into formal economic models. For some economists, the intuition regarding the fact that the society matters counts more than the lack of theoretical uphold.

It is necessary to distinguish at least four approaches in order to reach a definition of social capital.

1. Anthropological literature is the source that supports the idea that we human beings have natural instincts towards association.
2. Sociological literature describes not only social norms, but also the sources of human motivation, emphasizing the forms of social organization.
3. Economic literature draws on the assumption that people will maximize personal profits, deciding to interact with others. The key question resides in the strategies of investment of individuals when facing several uses of time.
4. Political science literature stresses institutions' role and the social-political norms that govern human conduct.

A very important element within social capital is confidence, which can be seen in two ways: resort and result. It is possible to distinguish three different types of confidence: that which arises between relatives or colleagues; that which arises between strangers; that which people have in public and private institutions.

It is necessary to clarify that social capital *is* instead of what is *done*, thus leaving aside trust as the definition of social capital by understanding it as a result and not as an argument.

When there is not confidence among individuals and cooperation networks ensure conformity, the former tend not to cooperate. Social capital enables individuals, groups and communities to solve collective problems easily. Norms of reciprocity and cooperation networks ensure conformity.

Michael Woolcock (1998: 151-208) talks about the union of social capital with the capacity of individuals and communities for the leverage of resources, ideas and information of formal institutions, beyond the community's immediate sphere. Moreover, he identifies three basic types of social capital, which he divides into social ties, bridges and links. Social ties arise between families and ethnic groups. Bridges arise between distant friends, associates and colleagues. Links refer to the status and the type of health care to which the different groups have access.

How can social capital be measured? If it is difficult to establish a term to talk about social capital, it is much more complicated to define the policies or ways that may happen to exist to measure it. The few measurements available have focused on the confidence and commitment levels between social interactions.

In 2000, Putman (2001b: 43) carried out a measurement of social capital based on an index taking account the intensity and the way of getting involved not only of the community, but also of the organizational life.

The World Bank has developed policies to measure social capital, working on the specific design of recognition models and with already existing modules. Narayan and Pritchett (2001: 43) in 1998 constructed a measurement of social capital in rural Tanzania and used the data of the SCPS (Recognition of Poverty and Social Capital of Tanzania).

Lastly, social capital's policies are as follows: it is necessary to have support for families; backing for voluntary initiatives; governmental processes for decision-making; technology and social capital; the union of health care with communities (OECD, 2001).

Once we have presented the basic introduction to social capital we face the following problem: how is it social capital assigned to the Third World?

The World Bank has included social capital within capital's four basic forms: natural capital, constructed capital, human capital, social capital.

However, it looks as if this division is not at all applicable to the problems of the world, because, since there doesn't exist a definition of social capital, the term being multidimensional and applicable to different levels and units of analysis, situations come up such as the one in Colombia or Tanzania, where it is evident that the rates of development of modern society are limited but can not be classified or assessed. In 1997, Knack and Keefer (2001: 45) carried out experiments in Tanzania with the aim of establishing social capital measurements, finding that in contexts of most poverty, families with higher incomes are the ones that take part in collective organizations most, besides the fact that the accumulated social capital particularly benefited them. This completely nullifies the argument under which the term "social capital" was created.

It seems that the challenge of social capital is to solve and adapt to the problems of the Third World with regard to development, running up against the fact that there are problems in its application because of the fact that the socialization of material and intellectual goods is required, and this is not always feasible.

Ethnic and racial discrimination, economic inequalities, differences in levels of education, and the absence of public health, are harmful to the development of a country. Thus, what we have to take into account is the fact that by creating a bridge within social capital these differences are stressed, as it is much more difficult for ideas and resources to circulate – mainly– among groups, causing the social, political and economic forces that divide regions and societies to acquire greater importance, slowing down and damaging development.

Although the community bridge turns out to be a risk for development, we find that the community view of social capital –identified with clubs, associations and civic groups– has had more success in those societies in which it has been tried.

Those interested in applying this view to certain communities argue that social capital is inherently good, and that its presence has always a positive impact on the community. They apparently try to fight against the complete absence of social cohesion that has been displayed in the last decades, in addition to the abrupt rupture of the chain of dependence of the poor –it being the case that for the first time they are utterly useless and not required– to which Dordick (1997) responds that from the view of social capital, social ties are essential for the poor who try to survive as they have something to lose: themselves.

According to this tautological situation in which the poor hold up from a feeble term –which social capital is– some studies have been carried out about the ties that develop in communities and the needs that have been posed. Some of these studies have ended up as policies.

One of social capital's great successes exists in Bangladesh, in the Grameen Bank. This last has fought for the decrease of poverty in a more general way. We find that in this bank, social capital is connected with a particular network used with the promotion programs of intra-group credits and that it has granted loans to women without backing, helping them to expand their micro-enterprises provided that they have small groups of equals as the basis of their membership. The system is evidently very well planned up to this point, but the difficulties start when people who seek a loan exceed the bank's budget, forcing it to close its credit plans for the rest. We must note above all that this system has not known how to apply this procedure to a great quantity of people, forgetting that it was created to help the poor, so it seems to be a funnel where only the first-come obtain benefits, the other poor being neglected and forgotten.

We must not forget the synergistic proposal, which from our point of view surpasses social capital's institutional view. The institutional view brandishes the idea that the community networks' and civilian society's vitality are intrinsically related to the political context, social capital thus being a dependent variable of the system.

The reason for assigning greater strength to synergy than to the institutional is that the institutional does not consider the macroeconomic component over macroeconomic policy, while the synergy proposes to integrate both institutional spheres as networks searching for the following conditions: professional alliances, dynamics and relations between and within state bureaucracies, and several actors of civilian society.

We know the criticism that has arisen regarding the implementation of social capital policies to big societies and nations, in addition to being conscious of the bottleneck that exists between

social capital and the poor. What struck us about the synergy within social capital is that it promotes an utter integration between governmental policies and civic action, relying on the principle of complementarity and on the formulation of three main policies:

1. to identify the nature and extent of the formal social and institutional relations of a community, as well as the way in which these interact;
2. to develop institutional strategies based on social relations (in their three categories), focusing in particular on the amount of social capital constructed from unit ties and bridges, so as to
3. work out social capital's positive signs, such as cooperation, confidence, the ties that spring up, and the fact that the institutions dedicated to their work can compensate for sectarianism, isolationism and corruption (Woolcock and Narayan, 2002).

Once these policies are available, it would seem to be easy to assign them to countries' development, but the fact is that social capital's application is one of the great challenges of development.

In order to have an optimal viability, it is necessary firstly to carry out a geographical social study. This will show the needs per region of the communities to which it is desired to take the social capital so as to be able to use the policies of development. According to the research that has been done, social scientists have noticed that needs change drastically from one community to the next. Hence, it is necessary to implement a policy that covers them all –in spite of the diversity.

It is also very important to make it clear that the people who implement social capital in these regions must be ethical in their discourse, since only in this way will it be possible to obtain that all those involved in the question of development in the chosen region are consulted about the issues, it then being possible to reach consensus and decide priorities, what is fair and what is not.

It is necessary that in the regions in which it is desired to use social capital in an institutional way –legitimizing clubs, organizations, bridges and links– there exist an ethical environment and above all that the concept be emphasized of the ethics of the alliance, through which we will mutually recognize people as such beyond a previously established tie.

Social capital is not salvation for the development problems that the Third World faces. Even though it must be used in a just and ethical way, it must also be studied from an objective perspective, so that it may then indeed become a key element. Up until now, it has been used as a standard of Non-Governmental Organizations with not much seriousness.

Michael Woolcock and Deepa Narayan (2002) suggest a policy of “learning by doing” with regard to social capital, and not waiting until researchers draw up the necessary policies to attack the great problem of worldwide development. May be this is a little bit venturesome, yet it is in fact necessary to go into action in order to face a daily problem such as development, but it is precisely a problem such that if the term hasn't been well defined and it is not known how to use it adequately, must be faced under the “learning by doing” system. For development and social capital to complement, there must exist simultaneous practices and policies. We cannot expect researchers to do everything while the people for whom it is aimed allocate it according to their necessities. It must be a joint work; it must take into account people's needs, and researchers must work on a real and applicable basis. Only then will they be able to talk about development with social capital as a whole.

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Notes

* Director of postgraduate on Humanistic Studies at the Technological and Superior Studies Institute of Monterrey (ITESM), state of Mexico Campus, Mexico.

** Doctoral student on Humanistic Studies at the ITESM, state of Mexico Campus.

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1 We take up again the ideas relating to development from Kande Mutsaku Kamilamba (2003).

2 "[T]hose tangible substances [that] count for most in the daily lives of people: namely good will, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse among the individuals and families who make up a social unit... The individual is

helpless socially, if left to himself... If he comes into contact with his neighbors, there will be an accumulation of social capital, which may immediately satisfy his social needs and which may bear a social potentiality sufficient to the substantial improvement of living conditions in the whole community. The community as a whole will benefit by the cooperation of all its parts, while the individual will find in his associations the advantages of help, the sympathy and the fellowship of his neighbors". Taken from The School of Education and Social Policy, Northwestern University. In

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