

**Removing Unfreedoms  
July 7<sup>th</sup> Colloquium  
London School of Economics**

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My name is Antonio Vigilante and I have been working with the UNDP for twenty-two years. I have worked in different continents, in Africa, Latin America, in Eastern Europe and now in the Arab world.

I must say that I will not pretend to be a ...washing machine, to keep with the metaphora introduced earlier on in this colloquium, but that I would try instead to be a... cooking stove. In fact, I will tell you a little bit of what has been cooking in the UNDP pot in the last ten/twelve years, since when we have embraced the human development approach to our work, in our development cooperation. In doing that, I will however just focus on three lines of work, which are those that have been emphasised in recent years: information, human development needs assessment and participative programmes.

**Information**

We have heard this morning how critical is the need for information in order to remove obstacles to development as freedom. Now, information has two main directions. The first information from people, the one through which government operators and policy makers become acquainted and knowledgeable about what people feel and want and what their aspirations are. The other is how to bring information to people; how to make them aware of certain development processes, so that they can exercise some pressure and demand accountability from their rulers. Information is the basis and the trigger for the demand of popular participation.

To facilitate access to information, we use a variety of instruments. But chief among these is the **Human Development Report** that saw the light originally as a global instrument, but which has later been nationalised and even localised. In Egypt, for instance, UNDP is preparing one human development report for each one of the twenty-seven regions of the

country, so bringing the analysis of human development, including the calculation of the Human Development Index, down to the level of municipalities and the level of villages. In such a way, we come to know and make available to the public domain, a wealth of information that is critical to understand human development gaps and geographic disparities and the different needs and demands, that vary from one region of the country to the other.

### **Poverty Measurements and needs assessments**

We are also taking a different look at poverty measurement. Normally this is calculated according to expert points of view and statistical data, and "objective" poverty lines are thus obtained. But no matter how sophisticated these methodologies are, and some of them have become indeed quite sophisticated by now, they still represent an abstract construct. Therefore we have also conducted, "subjective" poverty line studies recently, which consist in asking the people themselves to define what is poverty and what is not, if they are below or up the poverty line. The results of such surveys are very interesting, because when compared with "objective" poverty line measurement, they may show significant differences.

For instance, in Egypt while objective poverty incidence is found to be highest in the rural areas and in the south of the country, subjective poverty is found as highest in the north of the country and in urban areas. This is understandable, since poverty is, in its essence, a relative concept and condition. This relativity of poverty perceptions predominates when asking people to assess themselves their situation. The comparison with the neighbours and with their environment influences decisively their perception and self-assessment of being poor or not poor.

These different perceptions cannot be ignored, and putting all this wealth of data and analysis on the public domain should spark a dialogue on different approaches to identify and solve development constraints and make surface very hard political choices and trade-offs.

We have also used new instruments in several towns to survey and identify people's aspirations. Although the country contexts can be very different and more or less

sophisticated, the instrument of human representative surveys can be used, in different forms.

We have done *human security surveys*, to understand whether and where people feel vulnerable.

We have done *aspirations surveys*, to see what really people wish. Similarly, we have conducted *youth aspirations surveys*. And we have a whole array of similar instruments, from using the media through “call in” programmes to printed press surveys and questionnaires. These tools can help us gain a better understanding of whether, we as development cooperation operators and the government policy makers respond well to people’s aspirations and allow to identify possible gaps in understanding and diagnosis. Too often policy makers and development operators double guess, “interpret”, assume people’s needs, without verification and validation by the people themselves.

Now all these instrument, of course, are only analytical tools and information that need to be “operationalised” and completed with participatory approaches in programme design, monitoring and evaluation.

### **Participative programmes**

I would have very interesting cases to illustrate participative programmes, which are the logical follow up to better needs assessments, but for lack of time I will just mention few, very briefly.

UNDP helped prepare and implement a programme for the lowland indigenous people of Bolivia few years ago. Through the “washing machines”, i.e. the interpretation and analytical support of community leaders and anthropologist, we have mainly worked directly with twenty-nine indigenous groups to help them define their own priorities and the results of such participative process showed us that they were different from what we may have thought.

We started with a self census, i.e. a census conducted by the same indigenous groups. So that even the very statistical information would have been collected, owned and prepared by the people we intended to support. One of the surprising finding of participative needs assessment was that their overall first development priority was radio communications. We would have probably never assigned such high priority to it, had we

proceeded in a more conventional programme formulation mode. The indigenous groups identified radio communications among themselves as the tool to break their isolation and join forces for development and social activities. We would have probably said that education or health services provision would have been their priority, we learned instead that the barrier they wanted to break first was isolation. Development as freedom for them passed through more and better communications before than basic services. Such a decentralised participatory approach to formulation is not only fair but also increased development assistance effectiveness and efficiency.

In Egypt, after having calculated the Human Development Index, at local level and at municipal level, we have selected the sixty bottom municipalities and are validating the the data with citizen's participation. By holding all kinds of stakeholders meetings, we aim at finding out whether data were telling us the true story or whether there were hidden local development constraints that people identify, beyond all statistical analysis. On the basis of that, we shall then build up, for each one of the municipality, a local recovery programme, funded by government and donors.

It must be noticed that when surveys are conducted and indicators prepared, they obviously represent averages, therefore they are not helpful in solving potential conflicts between individual aspirations and group aspirations, or community aspirations versus national or regional aspirations. We probably have to admit that in development cooperation it is frequently too complex to try to have a more "individualised" approach, which probably would be the closest to "development as freedom". However, careful analysis of surveys and stakeholders meeting should enable the development operators to identify specific concerns that may be addressed.

And, finally, I would mention one example from Bulgaria where we converted an institution (*chitalichte*), previously used as propaganda machine of the party, and based in libraries at the municipal and village levels, into an instrument of participation and a political forum, whereby people could have available an interface with local authorities. This enabled them to put up their demands and interpret the needs of the communities vis-a-vis municipal authorities. Telephone hotlines were also used in this context.

In sum, participation has been our answer to a better identification of the true barriers that people wanted to be removed for their development and to a safer identification of their relative priorities.

The last point I would like to make, is that we use media as an education and information channel as development tools much more than in the past. In Egypt, we have designed a programme, which is called "think twice" of *social advertising*, which is certainly common in England and Italy as well. It consists of using not educational or prescriptive messages, but rather preparing short intriguing spots on television (which is in over 91% of households in Egypt, 95% in Bulgaria, 85% Bolivia --that is really almost universal). This aims at making people reconsider certain attitudes, that represent themselves development obstacles sometimes or certain harmful traditions or practices. In this way we try to help people removing obstacles by themselves, obstacles, lets say, of a more psychological nature, through the use of media and social advertising. These are instruments that have served us well.

So, as a consequence of these (instruments). I would say that today, the programmes that UNDP engages in are often different than those of the pre- human development era.

The challenge of finding instruments, in the formulation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes, that will ensure more accountability to the communities, is however not yet fully addressed. It is important that we try even more to make people owners of development projects and make them evaluate impact with us and ensure that those programmes interpret well their ambitions.