

## **ETHICS OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

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## PREFACE

For long, it was considered that development per se is the answer to human problems like poverty, hunger and unemployment. Since the beginning of the first UN Development Decade forty years ago, this concept has proved to be an over-simplification in the context what is happening in real life in the areas of gender and economic equity, environmental degradation and jobless economic growth. The nineteen nineties witnessed excellent documentation, as well as identification of remedial measures, in various UN Conferences, starting with UN Conference on the Child organized by UNICEF at New York in 1990 and ending with the World Conference on Science and Development organized by UNESCO at Budapest in 1999. We now know the development maladies in ethical terms, as well as the potential remedies. The UN Millennium Development Goals in the areas of hunger, poverty, employment, equity and ecology provide some of the answers to the dilemmas confronting Governments today everywhere.

Bhutan, a small nation, has suggested a method to make development human and nature-centred. This country has proposed the concept of **Gross National Happiness (GNH)**, instead of Gross National Product (GNP), to measure the achievements and impact of development. GNH includes, in addition to the normal indicators of economic development and ecological security, cultural promotion, spiritual values and good governance as additional parameters to measure whether development enhances human happiness or increases human misery (Gross National Happiness, The Centre for Bhutan Studies, Thimphu, Bhutan, July 1999). In this connection, it may be useful to recall the pathway prescribed by the French Mathematician, Marquis de Condorcet, a contemporary of Thomas Malthus, for achieving population stabilization, which is an urgent imperative in most developing countries. Condorcet wrote, “population will stabilize itself, if children are born for happiness and not for mere existence.” An ethical mindset and work culture are pre-requisites for achieving a paradigm shift from mere existence to a productive and happy life.

We now see everywhere a growing violence in the human heart. A part of this violence is due to a feeling of social injustice and inequity. This leads to young men and women committing suicide to kill others. In 1955, Bertrand Russell and Albert Einstein launched the Pugwash movement to sensitise the scientific community about their ethical responsibility for the consequences of their inventions. At that time, their concerns related to nuclear wars. Now, we face the even greater threat of biological weapons, resulting from the unprecedented power conferred by genetic engineering, genomics and proteomics to create novel organisms not found in nature. It is, therefore, time to stress, as Russell and Einstein did 48 years ago, “Remember your humanity, and forget the rest. If you can do so, the way lies open to a new Paradise; if you cannot there lies before you the risk of universal death.”

The present paper is structured in a manner to not only articulate the ethical dimensions of development and management of environmental capital stocks, but also to indicate the pathway to an ethical and happy human future. The International Bioethics Committee of UNESCO has rendered a great service by getting a Universal Declaration on Human Genome and Human Rights adopted by Member States. We need a similar declaration on the Plant Genome and Farmers' Rights. There is also need for a more intensive debate and discussion on the ethical aspects of functional genomics, proteomics and nano-technology. Future economic and human development will become increasingly technology-driven. Unless the technology push is matched by an ethical pull, we will find, to quote Albert Einstein, "the products of our brain will become a curse rather than a blessing."

A useful benchmark for measuring the ethical dimensions of a development effort will be an assessment, whether it is *pro-poor, pro-nature or pro-women*. There should be mandatory introduction of an *ethical impact analysis* in the case of major development projects. The right to food and clean drinking water should be regarded as a fundamental human right, and not as charity. Only then, the urgently needed political priority to education, health care and employment will be forthcoming. The culture of ethics can be fostered rapidly if from early childhood, our education system will help to propagate the following message of Swami Vivekananda "This life is short, the vanities of the world are transient, but they alone live who live for others, the rest are more dead than alive."

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