A Normative Model for the Practice of Cooperation in Development as a Basis for International Social Justice

Henk Jochemsen

Abstract
The development aid of affluent to poor countries is currently much debated. The results are not as expected and the economic crises has made affluent countries focus more on their own economic problems. Serious injustices in international relationships are maintained. This situation asks for a normative view of development work that could avoid the pitfalls of unrealistic expectations on the one hand and a reduced economistic approach on the other, that has aggravated inequalities among populations in many countries. Such an analysis leads to the conclusion that development is the result of cooperative human action in social practices and institutions aiming at value realisation. Religion and world view play an important role in the direction of the practice. Respecting the inherent normativity of the practices of cooperation in development would promote justice both at the micro and the macro level. Nothing less than a system change is required to achieve this. This will require a form of moral leadership.

1. Introduction
The development aid of wealthy to poor countries is currently much debated, if not criticized. The aid does not seem to further economic growth in the ‘developing’ countries, many of the poorest countries have actually seen their real per capita incomes decline since the 1970s and more than one billion people still live on less than $1,25 a day.\(^1\) Hence, when the goal has been the eradication of severe poverty the ODA\(^2\) has failed so far even though development assistance by CSO, working with government subsidies, reports important results in several sectors of society.\(^3\) Furthermore, in some so-called middle income countries like India and China that demonstrate significant economic growth, a large percentage of the population

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continues to live under the poverty line. Both within nations and on an international level grave injustices continue to exist. In 2015 Oxfam Novib published a report arguing that in 2016 the top 1% of the world population will possess more than half of all wealth.\(^4\)

In this paper I will first give a brief analysis of the background of this failure at the level of modern culture in general and subsequently present an understanding of the practice of ‘cooperation in development’ that could help avoid the mistakes of mainstream development assistance.\(^5\) Finally, the implications of the presented model for the notion of (social) justice and for leadership in social structures will briefly be indicated.

2. Modern development assistance and its problems

In my view development assistance can be seen as project of modernity (in the philosophical sense).\(^6\) Modernization can be understood as a change in the relationship between mankind and reality. Reality was no longer seen as divine creation that harbours an intrinsic normativity. In the modern approach the world is seen as value-free matter that can be used as the raw material for the technological (re)construction of a world according mankind’s own views.\(^7\) These developments have contributed to impressive positive developments in society. But as a result the abstractions that characterize modern science and technology and have a legitimate place in them, also began to guide the scientific technological applications in society at large. This entailed foregoing the intrinsic normativity in reality. Exploitation of the natural environment, fragmentation of social structures and the experience of the loss of meaning are typical manifestations connected to that overestimation of the scientific-technological approach to reality. I conclude that the various crises we presently experience, of finance, food and fuel (all broadly understood) have their background in modernization gone wild, with its unjust and unsustainable systems of mass production and consumption.

3. Progress and development assistance

\(^4\) Oxfam International, *Wealth: having it all and wanting more*. (Oxfam issue briefing, January 2015),


Development assistance as we know it since 1949s can be seen as one of the great projects of modernity, and of modernity gone wild for that matter. But if this is the case it should have consequences for the way in which we give shape to development assistance. If the ‘developing’ countries would achieve the same level of economic production and consumption as the ‘developed countries’, the crises would be worsened. But continuation of the present large scale injustices both within and between countries is morally unacceptable. In order to remediate injustices at an international level it is necessary that the predominant (neoliberal) model of modernization be replaced by more integral views of ‘development’ and ‘progress’ in which social and ecological justice and the well-fare of all people will be given at least the same weight as growth of the GNP of countries. Below, after making a few general observations about the Normative Practice Model, I will briefly present such a more integral model for ‘cooperation in development’, making use of earlier work on normative professional practices.\(^8\) First, some general remarks.

a) This approach starts from the presupposition that not only in the physical reality but also – be it in a different way – in social reality we can distinguish structures that manifest a degree of normativity: certain ways of doing things, e.g. in education, lead to better results than other ways. The normative practitioner model reflects this observation.

b) The model applies at the level of personal interactions between people in the context of professional practices; i.e. they apply primarily at the meso level in society. The relation to the macro level of structures at national and international level can be seen as constituting the broader context for those practices. The presupposition under a) also implies that the macro structures should respect and facilitate the normativity that can be identified at the level of practices. This will be elaborated below.

c) I start from the following general description of (normative) practices; a normative practice is a socially established human activity, of which its typical core value (telos) will be realized in an optimum way by observing the standards of excellence of that practice.

With this in mind we now turn to the practice of cooperation in development.

4. **Normativity in the practice of cooperation in development**

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\(^8\) Henk Jochemsen, “Normative practices as an intermediate between theoretical ethics and morality”, *Philosophia Reformata* 71 (2006), 96-112.
The first question to answer is: what is development? Is development the same as modernization and economic growth? In my view in its core development can best be seen as value-realization. People in general pursue values in a variety of practices and institutions.

Each of the practices and institutions (here mainly seen as the societal structures that (should) facilitate practices as described above) pursues the realization of important values, viz. each one’s telos. In other words, development can be understood as the process that is the fruit of human action aiming at the realization of values in the variety of society’s practices and institutions (Jochemsen, 2009). The telos of a practice is realized well if a constellation of ‘standards of excellence’, characteristic for that practice, is observed. These standards are derived from the normative principles related to the modal aspects that in Reformational philosophy are distinguished in reality (see table 1).

Table 1: Modal aspects of reality and their normative principle

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<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Quantitative (discrete amount)</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Spatial (continuous space)</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Kinematic (movement)</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Physical (energy + mass, forces)</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Biotic / Organic (life functions + organisms)</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Sensitive / Psychic (sense, feeling, emotion)</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Analytical (distinction, conceptualization)</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Formative (deliberate shaping: history, culture, technology, achievement)</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Lingual (meaning carried by symbols)</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Social (‘we’: sociality, relationships, roles)</td>
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<td>11.</td>
<td>Economic (frugal management of resources)</td>
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<td>12.</td>
<td>Aesthetic (harmony, surprise, play, enjoyment; expressiveness)</td>
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<td>13.</td>
<td>Juridical (due: responsibilities+rights; justice)</td>
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<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Ethical (self-giving love, generosity; care)</td>
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<td>15.</td>
<td>Pistic (vision, aspiration, commitment, belief)</td>
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For example, education should be directed at the formation of students and not primarily at making a financial profit for the educational institution. At the same time the practice and institution of education have an economic aspect that pertains to an efficient way of doing things and of handling scarce resources. It also functions in the juridical aspect – to mention

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just one other – that presents itself in the legislation regarding formal education. These rules also need to be observed. But this example will make clear that the economic and juridical aspects are meant to be *supportive* for but not qualifying of the telos of educational practices. One can imagine legislation that frustrates teachers in their practice of education; such legislation is undesirable because it does not support but frustrates the realization of the core value (telos) of that practice.

Back to development and the practice of development cooperation. For development assistance/cooperation as a field and a practice this view on normative practice and on development implies that *such assistance aims at the promotion of the well-functioning of the practices and institutions that are relevant in a certain setting*. One can think of public policy/good governance, private economic sector, financial services, farming, education, health care. The well-functioning of these practices and institutions in mutual adjustment will create a good starting point for furthering human well-being. The mutual adjustment is important since whenever in society one social sphere dominates the other spheres -be it the private corporate sector or an organized religious body- human freedom and responsibility are truncated and the realization of certain values will be frustrated. In short, developmental work aims at meaning-oriented creative shaping of social practices and institutions that deal both with the physical and the social reality.

This implies that development cooperation is principally cooperation based on equality. How the work in the diverse practices will be performed belongs to the competency of the professionals in those practices. The professional of the development agency should facilitate. *In light of these considerations, the core value of development cooperation is the formation (training, education) of people to equip them to better realize the core values of their practices.*

Understandably the cooperation requires affinity with respect to the main values and ways of working between the partners and if the missions of the partners do not coincide sufficiently any longer one may have to decide to stop the cooperation. What should in general be avoided is that the (northern) donor organisation uses a southern organization as a executing vehicle for its own programmes. Then the development in that country will be too much externally driven. Only in specific case for specific relatively short term projects this can be a fruitful option.
Development cooperation should also really be cooperation because ‘we’ as much as ‘they’ should ‘develop’, or rather, change. Economic development in the receiving countries will never really be achieved by support of certain economic sector like agriculture only. International economic relationships should become more just; the poor countries should receive the opportunity to trade and to temporarily protect their own production capacity in order to make it sufficiently robust to stand international competition. This means that the wealthy countries be willing to share economic and financial power.

**Rules and Virtues**

Competent performance of a practice requires the observation of the principles and rules of the practice. The rules governing behavior often have an implicit, tacit character. This means that rules can be followed even without a conscious decision of the practitioner at each moment they are applied. To achieve this practitioners need to have certain virtues in order to competently observe the constitutive principles and rules of their practice and thus realizes the telos of that practice. Virtues can be considered as the embodiments of the normative principles in stable normative attitudes of the practitioner.

**Directional side**

In addition to the normative structure of practices, briefly presented above, we need to call the attention to the so-called the directional side.\(^\text{10}\) The directional side of practices refers to the control beliefs, motivations, normative convictions that form part of one’s world view and constitute that person’s interpretative meaning-giving framework.\(^\text{11}\) These control beliefs and normative convictions often are not immediately apparent, yet they function strongly in the form of unwritten, sometimes even unspoken codes of conduct and customs, convictions on what is decent and indecent. In our view it belongs to the normativity of structural development cooperation at the level of the population, as civil society organisations do, to build relationship of trust that enable a dialogue in which also the more fundamental beliefs and convictions can be discussed. Only in this way the world view of modernity that is often implicitly transferred to, if not imposed on the communities receiving development assistance, can be critically assessed in order to reinterpret the assistance in terms of one’s own world


view. And where this implicit world view is rejected, development projects easily fail. Where it is not critically reconsidered it may seriously disturb the receiving communities.

Since justice in international relations is a special focus of this paper, in the final section we will focus on the juridical aspect of the practice of development cooperation.

5. Justice in international cooperation in development

The observation that a practice functions in the juridical aspect implies that the core principle of that aspect, justice, should be observed in the practice. This has significance for the internal functioning of the practice but also for its functioning in the broader macro structures of society. We will briefly comment on both levels.

**The role of rights in development cooperation**

The juridical aspect fulfils an important role in the practice of cooperation in development. The formation and strengthening of practices and their related institutions, of which the state is one, requires support from the law and regulations and their observance. In cooperation in development this aspect rightly receives a lot of attention. The correct functioning of the different institutions of the state (democratic bodies like parliament, the jurisdiction, the land registry, the tax system), the equal access of people to public services like education and health care, the functioning of financial services, etc. are focus areas of the work of many NGO’s in donor as well as in receiver countries. Because of this focus some organisations in development cooperation characterize their approach as ‘rights based approach (RBA)’. In the context of cooperation in development the RBA has been elaborated into an approach that is much broader than just claiming rights. In this broad way the RBA can fulfil an important role in developmental work.

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12 Cf. Van der Walt, *When African and Western Cultures meet*.
System change

It is obvious that the juridical aspect also has a particular importance for cooperation in development at the national and international level. In a sense we could say that the overall guiding principle for international relationships and policy should be righteousness, in a broad sense of seeing to it that all people and groups of people get their due as a precondition for their individual and communal flourishing. In the practice of the state’s public policy this gets the shape of justice in the sense of legal arrangements and international governance structures that further the earlier mentioned righteousness.

It will also be obvious that these national and international governance structures will significantly influence the practices involved in the developmental process at the meso and micro level. I recall the earlier statement that the macro structures should facilitate and further the meso and micro level practices in which people use to pursue the values that give their lives substance and meaning. Unfortunately we have to note that to a significant extent the reverse is true. The international trade arrangements and monetary structures often are disadvantageous for the poor countries.\(^\text{16}\) In particular the neoliberal economic ideology that in recent decades has been prevalent in the affluent Western world, has generated cycles of inclusion of those groups that had already achieved a certain level of modernization and of exclusion of the really poor. An elaboration of this issue is beyond the scope of this contribution.\(^\text{17}\) I give just one example. In March 2011 the European Parliament adopted a resolution on ‘Tax and Development–Cooperating with Developing Countries on Promoting Good Governance in Tax Matters’.\(^\text{18}\) In this resolution the EP “26. Notes with concern that billions of dollars per year left the African continent between 1991 and 2004; in particular, underlines that these outflows are estimated at 7,6% of the annual GDP of the region, which makes African countries net creditors of donor countries;” and “55. Highlights that as much as EUR 800 billion is lost each year from developing countries to tax havens and illicit financial flows;”. Clearly the international financial-economic power structures contains


\(^{17}\) But see Goudzwaard et al., 2007.

gross injustices that prevent an effective handling of the severe poverty of around a billion people in the world.

Nothing less than a conversion is required first of all of the affluent nations, their governments and financial and economic elite. A conversion that should manifest itself in a radical change in the economic system of production and consumption.\(^\text{19}\) Space lacks to elaborate this.\(^\text{20}\)

**Moral leadership**

Both in ‘developed’ and in ‘developing’ countries such a conversion and system transition can only occur if people want to commit themselves to a normative view of life, community and society. In this context I’d like to identify two necessary, though not sufficient preconditions of such a commitment. The first is an inspiring and convincing view on one’s own place in society and the way in which one can participate and contribute. In my opinion such a view should primarily depart from a Biblically inspired understanding of reality in which meaning and order precede existence. Normative social structures as explained above have an important place in this understanding of the world.

The second precondition for the required transition is a form of leadership. A leadership that manifests itself in an excellent performance of practices implying the virtues that enable practitioners to observe all the normative principles of each particular practice. Only if the whole constellation of virtues is being manifested, good development consisting in the realization of values, will be achieved. Considering the tensions and conflicts in international development policy, pursuing justice in those practices especially requires one of the four classical cardinal virtues, namely courage. It is needed in and of itself, but furthermore, courage is the virtue that makes the other virtues effective.\(^\text{21}\)

### 6. Summarizing remarks

Development cooperation in today’s sense can be seen as a project of modernization of the rich industrialized countries to tag along poor countries in a similar process of ‘development’,

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\(^{19}\) Cf. the work of Micah Network, [http://www.micahnetwork.org/](http://www.micahnetwork.org/) that is attempting to make a serious contribution.


\(^{21}\) A statement with this content is widely attributed to Aristotle and can be found in many websites on courage and leadership, but the source is not mentioned and I could not find it; see e.g. [http://www.eonetwork.org/octanemagazine/special-features/courageisthekeytogreatleadership](http://www.eonetwork.org/octanemagazine/special-features/courageisthekeytogreatleadership)
directed at (material) economic growth through industrialization with the aid of science and technology. Justified moral motives and well-understood self-interest formed the background of this project. But that same modernization-gone-wild, that has led to our high level of production and consumption and that through the process of globalization increasingly impacts the whole world, has also brought our present world in a number of related crises that seriously threaten the future of billions of people. The development model of the industrialized countries and of the emergent economies has reached its limits and constitutes a threat. At the same time the continuation of the often appalling poverty is morally unacceptable. In this contribution an attempt is made to present a normative view of development and development cooperation that could be the beginning of a normative framework for a more just and sustainable development, both in the rich and in the poor countries. In this view development is seen as the fruit of a society in which people realize values that are important for them by living and working in a diversity of practices and institutions that exist precisely in view of the realization of their core value. Respect for the intrinsic normativity of those practices and institutions, forms a precondition for a such a more just and sustainable society.

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Questions for discussion

1) In this paper some characteristics of modernity are seen as background of major problems of our age; what are these characteristics? do you agree? What achievements of modernity would you like to redeem?

2) What specifically Christian notions could/should be part of the ‘directional side’ of the practice of cooperation in development by Christian NGO’s?

3) Do you think Christians in the affluent countries are sufficiently aware of the global injustices and express this awareness in their lives? If not, how come? How could this be improved?

4) How and in what contexts do you think Christian leadership should and could make a difference with respect to promote a more just society at the various levels?