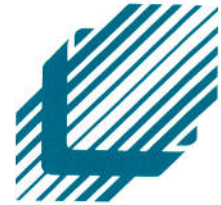


Development Bank  
of Southern Africa



Needs-based  
development strategy  
and the RDP

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Some broad issues

Johan C van Zyl



# Needs-based development strategy and the RDP

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The Development Bank of Southern Africa is a development finance institution whose primary aim is to facilitate development and empower people in the region.

### **Note**

This is a discussion paper reflecting the opinion of the author and not necessarily that of DBSA. It is published in the interest of open debate on development issues and not as a formal policy position.

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## Preface

The Capacity Building Support Division had a mandate, derived from the overall mission of DBSA, to pursue the goal of stimulating and facilitating learning opportunities focused on

- understanding development and development thinking
- improving managerial and administrative competencies in the particular context of managing processes of social and community development.

This brief includes target audiences both inside and outside the Bank.

**J Moalusi**  
General Manager:  
Corporate Management Services

Disenchantment with the narrow thrust and the poor development record of the conventional (GNP) growth-centred approach, which is currently widespread, is clearly relevant to a new South Africa. So are attempts to devise alternative, more human-centred visions or paradigms of development.

These broad issues are part and parcel of understanding development and falls within the mandate of the Division, but in fact constitutes an essential foundation and point of departure for its work in building management capacities in the field of development.

**Johan C van Zyl**  
Capacity Building Support Division





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## 1. Introduction

The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) is now officially on the table for practical implementation. In view of election promises and the prolonged struggle for freedom from apartheid, the new government is understandably under much pressure to 'deliver'.

There are nevertheless a number of major issues surrounding the RDP that require legitimate and serious discussion. Four of these are addressed in this paper:

- the meaning and purpose of reconstruction and development in a diverse and divided society such as South Africa
- understanding and interpreting human needs in a broad development context
- 'basic needs' and its appropriate role in a development strategy aimed at addressing genuine poverty
- relieving resource constraints.

## 2. The meaning and purpose of reconstruction and development

The term 'development' is often used to mean anything the user wants it to mean! It therefore comes as no surprise that in the ideologically contested terrain of the new South Africa, business, labour, the ANC alliance and more conservative political entities often disagree about the appropriate thrust and content of reconstruction and development for South Africa.

Differences also exist between the heterogeneous ANC alliance partners, notably COSATU and the SACP. These problems have been glossed over in the past, in the broader interest of maintaining a united front against apartheid.

It seems more than likely that a considerable struggle lies ahead over the most appropriate meaning and purpose

of a reconstruction and development programme for a heterogeneous and complex society such as South Africa. At the heart of this is a conceptual struggle over the most useful vision or paradigm of development to work with in such a context.

### 2.1 Three visions of development

The postwar world has witnessed three major visions or paradigms of development, each of which enjoys strong support in one or other circle in South Africa.

#### 2.1.1 The growth-centred vision

The capitalist vision of development, with its central emphasis on economic growth and a free market system, enjoys much support amongst the business community. Such a paradigm has generally served the interests of South African business well. Internationally, it has contributed significantly to the overall material progress of many countries, albeit with relatively little impact on relieving the plight of the poor.

#### 2.1.2 The state-centred socialist vision

The Marxist vision of development as 'the socialist project', historically inspired by deeply-felt ideals of social justice, is still strongly supported in left-wing circles in the ANC alliance. Despite the collapse of the Soviet Union, the continuing debate in South Africa still shows strong support for key traditional Marxist ideas such as a powerful and hegemonic state, with the working classes as its major constituency; for solid efforts to do away with tradeable private property, supporting the ideal that capitalism should be transformed, not reformed; and generally for substantial intervention by the state in the private enterprise economy (*Work in Progress*, 1994).

Both these development visions have been subjected to severe criticism world-wide, especially following the 'lost' decade of the 1980s.

The growth-centred vision, seen as a panacea by many and pursued for many decades both in the West and in the Soviet Union, has certainly benefited many millions of people. It has not, however, resolved the problem of poverty for the majority of the world's population. It has also led to critical global ecological degradation. In essence, the orthodox growth-centred approach is not sustainable in either human or ecological terms.

The Soviet experiment has sustained for much of this century what has been called 'one of the most profound historical contradictions, the imposition of tyranny in the name of humanitarianism and justice' (Korten, 1991). Currently state socialism is fighting a rearguard action in most parts of the world.

### 2.1.3 The human or people-centred vision

The evolving crisis in the world and in traditional development thinking has given rise to a third approach which has rapidly gained ground in recent years. It has been variously termed 'another development', 'human scale development', 'people-centred development', 'the new economics', 'ecological economics' or 'humanistic economics'.

The new vision is unashamedly normative and often utopian, concentrating on how development ought to take place as opposed to how it actually occurs. It focuses on the content of development (namely its meaning and purpose) rather than on its form. Earlier economic growth models showed, in particular, a strong bias towards form (investment in physical capital and industrialisation, amongst others) as indeed did the traditional Marxist approach with its emphasis on the evolution of productive forces. This concentration on form rather than on developmental content has largely continued.

Perhaps the most important implication of defining 'development' in terms of its deeper content is the central proposition that 'development occurs

inside people - either they do it themselves or it does not happen at all'. It follows that it is simply not possible to *give* people 'development'. People can be given things or objects, but if development is to occur, they have to become personally involved. They will have to learn to accept increasing responsibility for managing their own development, that is, for becoming more self-reliant.

If people rather than objects or artefacts are placed at the centre of development, the processes through which human needs are addressed become crucial. Such processes are, in fact, the very stuff of life. Individual goods or services then become mere objects that may or may not contribute to the larger goal of enjoying a better quality of life.

## 2.2 Fundamental principles of human-centredness

The core tenets of the new human-centred vision can be outlined as follows (Hettne, 1988):

*Needs oriented.* Geared to meeting human needs, both material and non-material.

*Endogenous.* Stemming from the heart of each society which sovereignly defines its values and vision of the future.

*Self-reliant.* Each society (or community) relies primarily on its own strengths and resources, in terms of its members' energy and its natural and cultural environment.

*Ecologically sound.* Using the resources of the biosphere rationally, in full awareness of the potential of local ecosystems as well as the (local and global) outer limits imposed on present and future generations.

*Based on structural transformation.* The purpose of transformation would be to realise the conditions of self-management and participation in decision-making by all those affected in these processes, domestically and ultimately globally.

Without this kind of restructuring the goals implied in the above principles cannot be achieved.

Structural transformation is not, of course, unique to the human-centred vision. Traditional Marxism advocated revolution to bring about social transformation. However, the specific orientation and thrust of human development define the kind of transformation required, as derived from the particular normative content of the other four principles.

The reconstruction or transformation perspective of the RDP stands in need of clarification and debate. What is its developmental meaning, purpose and orientation rather than its form (for example, restructuring the civil service or meeting the basic needs of the poor)? Furthermore, to what extent will the political pressures of practical implementation water down the basic thrust of whatever reconstruction and development vision the RDP might wish to pursue?

### 2.3 Interpreting human needs

At the core of much of the antagonism and misunderstanding surrounding the RDP lie substantially different interpretations of human needs.

Although such a statement may sound academic and irrelevant to some, it is argued below that conceptual clarity in this sphere is crucial to designing effective development strategies for a new South Africa.

Two schools of thought have emerged in the general (conceptual) discussion of human needs.

*A positive approach* forms the basis of mainstream neo-classical economics. In this view human needs are

- universal and apply to all human beings and societies at all times in history
- to be expressed as desires or wants for material or economic goods and services
- measurable and quantifiable both in principle and in practice.

*A normative or subjective approach* ties in with the human-centred vision of development outlined earlier. In this view human needs are

- non-universal, that is, specific and relative to particular cultural contexts and historical periods
- to be expressed as including both material and non-material needs, which makes it a qualitative concept that partly falls in the realm of philosophical and religious values
- not measurable and quantifiable, even in principle.

It is clear that two very different conceptions of needs are involved. In the traditional growth-centred or neo-classical approach, human needs are defined in terms of desires or wants for objects or artefacts, for goods and services. Economic goods therefore directly satisfy human needs in a one-to-one relationship. 'Revealed preference' in the market place (consumers spending money on goods and services that they prefer rather than on others) then guides private production accordingly. Overall and in general, however, the more goods and services produced, the greater the satisfaction of human needs. At its core this relationship is essentially simple and direct.

The normative approach regards the traditional conception of needs as too narrow, superficial and economic. It takes no account of major non-material human needs such as the dignity of people or their freedom to chart their own destinies without hindrance. Hence, the relationship between economic goods and human needs, if needs should be defined in both tangible and abstract terms, is not one-to-one but complex and indirect.

While the latter broader and richer approach to human needs may well appeal to many, there has always been a question as to how it could be made operationally significant. Important strides have recently been taken in this sphere.

## 2.4 The contribution of Manfred Max-Neef and 'human scale development'

Manfred Max-Neef and a number of colleagues (Max-Neef et al, 1986), working in the broad tradition of alternative development, provide some particularly significant and useful insights. Since this important contribution is not yet widely known in South Africa, an outline of its main purpose and basic elements together with some clarification would seem to be useful.

Max-Neef visited South Africa in 1992 at the invitation of the Development Bank of Southern Africa. Amongst the spin-offs of his many interactions was the formal establishment in 1994 of a South African Human Scale Development Network to promote the ideas and practical implementation of this approach.

### 2.4.1 Some basic propositions

Any new approach to interweaving development and human needs must go well beyond the existing growth-centred paradigm. It should involve a new way of conceptualising development and lead to substantial changes in prevailing perceptions of appropriate development strategies.

What is required is a theory of human needs for development, that is for making the multi-dimensional human needs issue understandable and operational for development purposes.

If development is to be about people and not about objects - the fundamental postulate of human scale development - a basic question is how one determines whether one development process is better than another? In the orthodox growth-centred vision GDP is an indicator of the quantitative growth of objects, of goods and services. What is now required is an indicator of the qualitative growth of people or their quality of life, in order to evaluate the best development process. Quality of life, in turn, is determined by the

opportunities people have to satisfy their fundamental human needs.

In the conventional growth-centred approach, human needs are not defined in fundamental terms but rather as desires or wants for objects or artefacts, for particular goods and services. Economic goods can therefore satisfy needs directly in a one-to-one relationship. If, however, a more fundamental perspective on human needs were adopted, the process of meeting such needs would become more complex and should be viewed quite differently.

### 2.4.2 New concepts and insights

Drawing a clear distinction between fundamental needs and satisfiers of such needs is of central importance in such a view. For example, sustenance and shelter should not be seen as needs but as satisfiers of the fundamental need for subsistence. Similarly, education, study, research and meditation are not needs but satisfiers of the fundamental need for understanding. Failure to make this distinction will lead at best to a cosmetic improvement of the orthodox, mechanistic view of development.

#### *Characteristics of fundamental needs*

Given this crucial distinction, fundamental human needs are finite, few in number and classifiable. They are also universal, the same in all cultures and in all historical periods. What changes over time and among cultures is how these fundamental needs are addressed, that is, the particular satisfiers chosen by a society. Max-Neef classifies people's fundamental needs as

- subsistence
- understanding
- creation
- protection
- participation
- identity
- affection
- idleness
- freedom.

These fundamental needs form an interrelated and interactive system in which there are no linear hierarchies. Each fundamental need is in principle as important as any of the others (with the exception of the stark survival situation

in which the imperatives of simply staying alive are so great as to eliminate, for all practical purposes, even the possibility of choices or options).

The implication is that there is no fixed and unchangeable recipe for needs satisfaction as suggested by the traditional approach (for example, that of Maslow). In practice, the most important fundamental needs to be addressed would depend on an analysis of the particular situation in each community, region or society at large.

### *Re-interpreting poverty*

This perspective allows a useful re-interpretation of the concept of poverty. Any fundamental human need that is not adequately satisfied reveals a human poverty. Thus in addition to the conventional view of poverty as the poverty of subsistence due to insufficient income, food, shelter amongst others, there could also be a serious poverty of protection due to widespread violence and poor primary health systems; of affection due to oppression, authoritarianism and exploitation of the natural environment; of understanding as a result of poor education; of participation due to discrimination against women, ethnic and other minorities and excessive affirmative action; of identity due to the imposition of alien values upon local and regional cultures, forced removals and exile; and of freedom due to political oppression, censorship and excessive bureaucracy.

This conception of a wide range of potential human poverties casts new light on what is often termed the social fabric in a society.

### *Needs as deprivation and potential*

The nature or character of fundamental needs is twofold: there is a dimension of deprivation as well as of potential. This interpretation of needs brings out the constant tension between the two so peculiar to human beings. Generally, attention has been focused on deprivation, on that which is lacking and hence acutely felt. However, needs can also engage, motivate and mobilise people and, in so doing, are also a

potential which may eventually become a resource. For example, the need for participation is a potential for participation which, in turn, can be put to practical use in decision-making forums.

More generally, focusing also on the dimension of potential in respect of fundamental needs draws attention to the highly dynamic role of human creativity in the development process.

### *Adding a behavioural dimension*

To complete the picture of categorising fundamental human needs, human scale development adds four modes or ways of satisfying any fundamental need:

- to be (being)
- to do (doing)
- to have (having)
- to interact (interacting).

It should be remembered that in the context of human scale development people's behaviour is focused on devising satisfiers or societal processes to address fundamental human needs. Thus concrete and particular physical facilities or economic goods are, by definition, excluded from consideration. Actually, emphasising money and 'things' is likely to inhibit genuine satisfaction in most categories of fundamental needs.

### *Definitions*

'To be' defines attributes or attitudes, whether individual or collective. For example, effectively addressing the fundamental need for identity in a pluralistic South Africa would require people to be tolerant and respectful of diversity and the partial autonomy of different communities, culturally or ethnically defined.

'To have' is used in a more abstract sense and indicates (collective) institutions, customs, norms, mechanisms, non-material tools and laws and not physical facilities or goods and services. For example, to have literature and a learning culture are useful institutions or customs for satisfying the fundamental need for understanding, whereas their absence would make it more difficult to address this need effectively.

'To do' defines actions whether individual or collective. These can be expressed as verbs. For example, to express appreciation is a useful action for satisfying the need for affection.

'To interact' indicates collective locations or environments as settings in space and time. Examples in terms of the need for understanding would be settings such as schools, academies, workshops, groups, families, communities.

#### ***Depicting and using the system***

The complete system can be outlined as a matrix with the nine fundamental needs on one axis and the four modes of satisfaction on the other. The highly complex holistic vision of development is simplified to focus on 36 (9 x 4) aspects or categories of people living their daily lives.

In operational terms, it is possible to simplify matters even further by applying the systems approach in phases. For example, a group could be asked in phase one to indicate those few fundamental needs in terms of which they experience the most acute deprivation or poverty. In phase two, the four behavioural aspects could be introduced to pursue the design of appropriate satisfiers only in the categories identified. Later on, the facilitation process can be broadened until the complete matrix is addressed.

This initial simplification implies a focus on 'basic satisfiers' first, akin to the well-known 'basic needs approach', but is substantially enriched because it does not concentrate on material goods and services only.

Practical work has shown that it is sometimes useful to depict the integrated framework of human scale development as a wheel rather than a formal matrix (see page 7).

#### ***The nature of satisfiers***

As indicated earlier, fundamental human needs are addressed but also expressed through satisfiers. Satisfiers are not objects or economic goods and services such as in the orthodox approach, but social processes. These are infinite in number and variety as needs are in the conventional approach.

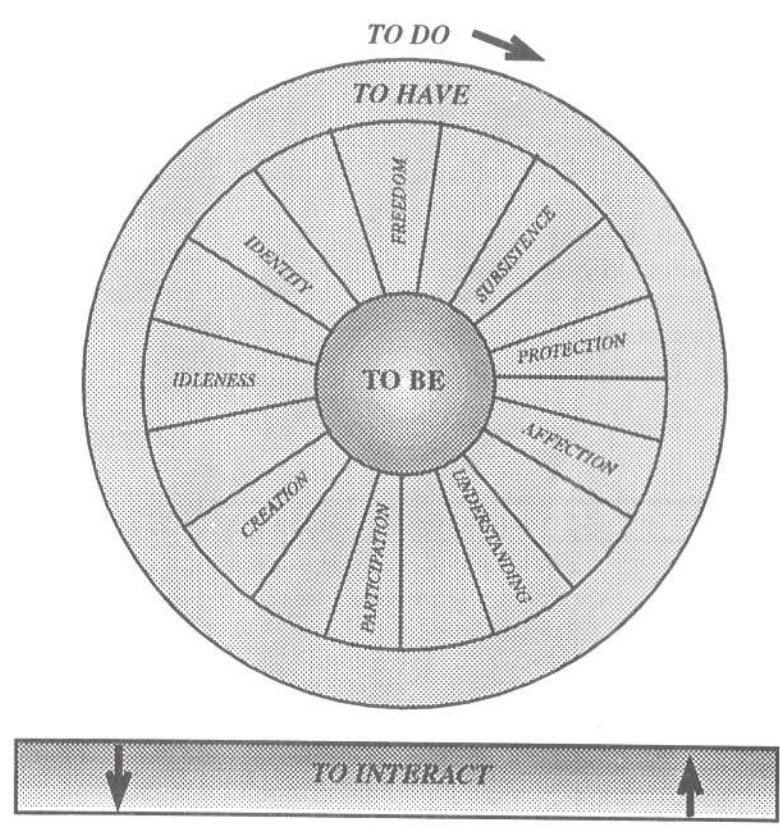
Such processes or satisfiers could include various forms of organisational arrangements, social practices, types of behaviour and attitudes, political and social structures, and indeed a great many ways and means related to structuring the process of living. In short, satisfiers represent the very stuff of life, which material goods and services fall far short of doing.

The relationship between fundamental needs and satisfiers is not necessarily one-to-one as in the case of conventionally defined needs and economic goods. Satisfiers can potentially address one or many fundamental needs simultaneously.

Moreover, this influence can be either positive or negative *vis-à-vis* quality of life. There is nothing inherently 'good' or 'bad' about the process of development. All depends on the nature of the satisfiers chosen.

Hence it becomes necessary to analyse the characteristics and attributes of particular satisfiers. For this purpose, Max-Neef suggests five types or categories (Max-Neef, 1986: 32-36). Three types are regarded as negative and the remaining two as positive in the quest of people to satisfy their fundamental needs.





THE WHEEL OF FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN NEEDS

**Negative Satisfiers**

	Type	Typical Feature	Examples
(i)	Destructive satisfiers	Imposed on people	Arms race, censorship, authoritarianism
(ii)	Pseudo-satisfiers	Induced through persuasion	Indoctrination, charity, status symbols
(iii)	Inhibiting satisfiers	Rooted in customs and habits	Paternalism, unlimited permissiveness, commercial television

**Positive Satisfiers**

	Type	Typical Feature	Examples
(iv)	Singular satisfiers	Institutionalised	Food kitchens, gifts, insurance systems
(v)	Synergic (multiple impact) satisfiers	Anti-authoritarian	Self-managed housing, direct democracy, educational games, breast feeding

***A dynamic relationship***

The interrelationship between fundamental needs, satisfiers and economic goods is a dynamic and dialectic one. Economic goods influence the efficiency of a satisfier thus leading to a greater or lower level or intensity of satisfaction. However, the satisfiers chosen, be they positive or negative, determine the generation of particular economic goods. Through this process

of reciprocal causation, they shape the culture of communities and of society at large.

### 2.4.3 Comparison of the two approaches to understanding human needs

The table below attempts to summarise the main differences between the conventional approach to human needs and that of human scale development.

## Human needs

Question	Conventional Approach	Human scale development
Definition	Desires or wants for objects or artefacts (economic goods and services)	A set of nine fundamental human needs which are the (absolute) benchmark components of quality of life
Quantum	Infinite	Finite, few in number and classifiable
How satisfied?	Directly by economic goods and services	Not directly by objects: satisfiers come in between fundamental needs and objects. Satisfiers are processes related to structuring the many ways that people might wish to live their lives
Nature of the needs/ satisfier relationship	One-to-one: in essence an increase in economic goods is always positive, implying greater needs satisfaction	Complex: an increase in satisfiers could have either a positive or negative impact on meeting fundamental needs
Mode of satisfying needs	By individually revealed preferences in the market place	Only collectively by (representatives of) a particular community, region or society
Interpretation of basic needs	Mainly in terms of the material poverty of subsistence	A number of deeply felt poverties could be relevant: leads to the idea of basic satisfiers rather than basic needs
Likely articulation of basic needs by government	Yes - because needs are regarded as a universal hierarchy (for example, Maslow)	No - because fundamental needs in principle form an interrelated system with no universal hierarchies. In practice every community has to determine its own most urgent priorities (excluding the stark survival situation)
Top-down implementation by government	Likely - general handouts of basic goods and services to address poverty appear to be the right thing to do	Unlikely - local communities would decide

## 2.5 Input from recent South African experience

In recent years some black local communities in South Africa have suffered much because of violence and internal division. The upshot has been another 'Catch-22' situation: no peace without development, no development without peace (Bremner, 1994).

Attempts to break through this impasse have had to recognise *inter alia* that local communities are not homogeneous but diverse. Many communities consist of a number of sub-communities or groups which have very different interests and hence prefer to adopt different satisfiers to address their fundamental needs. If resources are limited, fierce competition for these can arise only too readily.

The design of appropriate processes or satisfiers in such communities has to take these diversities seriously otherwise more conflict will occur.

Complexities of this nature make heavy demands on any facilitator. In particular, providing human scale development facilitators with conflict resolution skills appears to be essential for working effectively with the range of intense diversities in many local-level communities in South Africa.

## 2.6 Interweaving human needs and development strategy

A major conclusion from the general outline above is that two elements are absolutely crucial in determining a development strategy:

- the way in which human needs are understood
- the role and attributes ascribed to possible satisfiers of these needs.

Development geared to the satisfaction of fundamental human needs cannot, by definition, be structured from the top downwards. It cannot be imposed by law or by decree. It can only emanate directly from the actions, expectations and the critical and creative awareness

of the protagonists themselves, with government providing required support.

### *The need for greater self-reliance*

A good example arises from viewing the first four categories of satisfiers indicated on page 7 as exogenous to civil society, since they are usually imposed, induced or institutionalised from the top and advocated for all. On the contrary, the endogenous satisfiers derive from processes generated by communities themselves, often at grass-roots level.

One of the important aims of human scale development is to change the nature of the state, specifically, to move it away from its traditional role as a generator of satisfiers which are exogenous to civil society to a stimulator of processes from the bottom up.

Increasing the levels of local, regional and national self-reliance should, in fact, be deemed a major priority of state development policy and strategy. This objective can be achieved by facilitating the endogenous generation of synergic satisfiers at all levels of society. (Synergic satisfiers are those which stimulate and contribute to the simultaneous satisfaction of other needs.) The main operational issue then becomes one of how best to support the design of such satisfiers in full participation with the various communities involved.

### *Stretching scarce conventional resources*

The process of development is always constrained by scarce resources. The orthodox approach to making the best of these circumstances is to concentrate on efficiency. Human scale development adds the dimension of synergy. By focusing on societal processes with multiple impact (synergic satisfiers) conventional resources are stretched to achieve more. As indicated above, the basic idea is to encourage the creative and synergic potential that exists, but often lies dormant, in every society, especially at local community level. Combining efficiency with synergy is a promising strategy to relieve the

frustrations induced by resource constraints in the quest to improve the quality of life of people and particularly of the poor.

### *The engine of development*

Human scale development does not exclude conventional goals such as economic growth, aimed at enabling all persons to have greater access to the goods and services they desire. There is, however, a marked difference in the way the role of economic (GDP) growth is viewed.

Generally the aims of development are not regarded as points of arrival only but as essential components of the process itself. In other words, fundamental human needs can and must be addressed from the outset and throughout the development process. Everyone should be given the opportunity of personally experiencing development on a continuous basis. Instead of a goal, the process of addressing and satisfying fundamental needs becomes the engine of development itself (Max-Neef, 1989:45).

Such a dynamic and potentially powerful perspective will, however, become a practical reality only insofar as the overall development strategy adopted by the government of the day proves capable of stimulating the continuous generation of synergic satisfiers or multiple-impact development processes at all levels of society.

### *What role for government?*

This condition points to an essentially guiding, enabling and facilitative role for government, especially at lower levels. Planning and imposing its own agenda on communities or society would defeat the purpose of encouraging and enabling local communities to deliver their development. '[I]f people are to be the main actors in human scale development both the diversity and the autonomy of the spaces in which they act must be respected' (Max-Neef, 1986:13).

## 3. Basic needs and development strategy

'Meeting basic needs' is not only the heading of a major chapter in the RDP, it is also a key initiative in 'attacking poverty and deprivation [which] is the first priority of the democratic government'. In this sphere 'an extreme sense of urgency is required' (ANC, 1994: 15).

No development strategy ever aims explicitly at bringing about inegalitarian development. Yet conventional growth-centred strategies presume that social or regional inequality is a necessary price to pay for economic growth in the interim. Egalitarian strategies, on the other hand, usually give a higher immediate priority to distributional or redistributive issues.

One notable example is the 'basic needs' approach. By the early 1970s it was widely agreed that waiting for the 'trickle-down' effects of economic growth was not an effective strategy to address worldwide poverty which had worsened (Emmerij, 1981). Thus, the basic needs approach proposed a direct approach, arguing for some kind of development guarantee for the weakest social groups in society.

In retrospect, two elements of the basic needs debate of the 1970s are pertinent. (During the 1980s the basic needs intervention was pushed firmly into the background by a resurgence of neoclassical growth-centred thinking in the era of Reaganism and Thatcherism).

Firstly, the conceptual distinction drawn between growth in income and satisfying people's basic needs and therefore between an indirect and direct approach to poverty alleviation is of significance. The income approach aims at raising the real purchasing power of the poor sufficiently to enable them to afford and buy the basic needs basket themselves. This amounts to redistribution via employment stimulation and the market system.

A basic needs approach, in contrast, focuses sharply on mobilising particular resources for groups which are identified as deficient in certain critical spheres such as in nutrition. This selective approach makes it possible to satisfy the basic needs of the whole population at levels of income per head substantially below those that would be required by a less discriminating strategy of overall income growth and at an earlier stage.

'If an unfortunate but apt metaphor is permitted, the choice is between precision bombing and devastation bombing. By attacking the evils of hunger, malnutrition, disease, and illiteracy with precision, their eradication (or at least amelioration) can be achieved with fewer resources (or sooner) than by choosing the roundabout road of raising incomes' (Streeten, 1977).

The second aspect that stands out is the official support of the basic needs approach by major international institutions such as the ILO, UNEP and the World Bank. These and other important participants adopted at a 1976 World Employment Conference a proposal that national development strategies should place a high priority on both employment generation and the satisfaction of basic human needs.

During these events the ILO played a leading role. Central to their strategy of poverty alleviation was the creation of employment. This was given a higher priority than economic growth *per se*. No essential contradiction was suggested but it proposed that in order to maximise employment, development of agriculture and the informal sector in urban areas should be emphasised. Interestingly, public works programmes were hardly mentioned.

### 3.1 The record of implementing basic needs in developing countries

The Declaration adopted by the 1976 World Employment conference outlines the simple shopping list approach which focuses on the physical or economic conditions for survival. 'Basic needs ... includes two elements. Firstly, it includes certain minimum requirements of a family for private consumption: adequate food, shelter and clothing are included, as would be certain household equipment and furniture. Secondly, it includes essential services provided by and for the community, such as safe drinking water, sanitation, public transport, and health and educational facilities' (ILO, 1976).

However, in the Programme of Action the concept had become much more complex and included many non-material needs relevant to the quality of life. 'It is important to recognise that the concept of basic needs is a country-specific and dynamic concept. ... In no circumstances should it be taken to mean the minimum necessary for subsistence; it should be placed within a context of national independence, the dignity of individuals and peoples, and their freedom to chart their destiny without hindrance' (ILO, 1976).

The confusion created by these different interpretations has continued. The apparently simple basic needs concept ended up as a complex, fully-fledged development philosophy 'starting from the objective of providing the opportunities for the full physical, mental and social development of the human personality' (Streeten, 1977). Yet, as Streeten himself admits in the same article, 'there is nothing yet that could be described as a fully articulated Basic Needs Strategy, even as an adjunct to other strategies'. Such full articulation has never emerged.

It is perhaps not surprising that the simple shopping list version of the basic needs approach has usually been adopted by governments of developing countries. The emphasis has been on delivering basic services to the poor financed by transfers of income from the relatively well-off through the imposition of taxes.

In general, the more immediate and visible outcome has been expanded social service budgets, staff and facilities. However, the developmental results for the poor are difficult to distinguish from conventional relief and welfare programmes aimed purely at addressing the worst consequences of poverty. In fact, the wider impact of building the social or human capital of the poor through improved levels of nutrition, health and strength, and through education and skills enhancement has been disappointing (Korten, 1991). Integrating the poor into the mainstream of economic activity has proved to be a formidable and elusive challenge.

Breaking out of the vicious circle of poverty seems to require more than just human capacity building. The chief architects of the basic needs approach, working for the World Bank at the time, suggested that 'a major restructuring of the political and economic power relationships within a society is a precondition for the realisation of this basic needs strategy' (Streeten & Burki, 1978). This observation highlights the important issue that continued poverty also often involves structural barriers that limit access to credit, productive assets, markets and reasonable wages.

### 3.2 Basic needs and human scale development

The deeply people-centred development vision of Max-Neef and his colleagues has much to say about the nature of restructuring required for genuine human scale development (Max-Neef, 1986: III).

Some pointed observations can be made about the general debate and implementation record of basic needs.

Firstly, the overall goal of putting people and their needs at the centre of development is most laudable (Streeten & Burki, 1978). However, its practical implementation has left much to be desired.

Secondly, the shopping list approach adopted by many third-world governments implies focusing basic needs largely on the material poverty of subsistence, in other words on deprivations in the five core areas of safe drinking water and basic sanitation; adequate nutrition; primary health care; basic shelter; and basic education. Although linkages to various non-material needs were recognised, these were treated as side-effects and did not become the focus of specific attention in their own right. Poverties in areas other than material subsistence were therefore largely neglected.

Such an outcome is inevitable if human needs are understood in linear, hierarchical terms (Maslow) instead of as an interrelated system. Moreover, the satisfiers generated will, at best, be those identified as singular and aiming at the satisfaction of a single need having little impact beyond that.

Thirdly, basic needs are expressed in the traditional mode of wants or desires for particular economic objects, that is, for goods and services and not fundamental human needs. With governments being pressured to deliver subsidised food and basic services to the poor, the whole venture too often became little more than institutionalised charity: the focus being essentially on handouts rather than on stimulating empowerment and greater self-reliance.

A related comment concerns the conventional emphasis on accumulating physical or infrastructural capital with only limited regard for people's human development. Paradoxically, this increases the dependency situation of the poor insofar as they come to rely even more on externally generated satisfiers. The vicious circle of poverty

is not broken. A development strategy based on understanding needs in fundamental terms would stimulate the endogenous generation of satisfiers and, moreover, those with multiple impact such as synergic satisfiers.

Fourthly, participation was certainly regarded as important in many basic needs programmes. Yet the emphasis was mainly on getting people involved as co-producers in implementing service delivery projects that were initiated, planned and controlled by government. This form of participation can better be described as mobilisation rather than empowerment.

### 3.3 Improving the disappointing record of addressing basic needs in developing countries

What is perhaps critically absent in past efforts to address basic needs is a methodology and a strategy to meet the fundamental needs of the poor. Human scale development suggests exploring the idea of 'basic satisfiers' rather than 'basic needs' with representatives of local and other communities. This would involve discussing questions such as the following:

In which of the nine categories of fundamental needs is serious deprivation being experienced? In material subsistence only or are there other poverties as well? Answers to these questions would set the priorities for focusing on basic satisfiers to address those poverties that are most deeply and urgently felt by communities themselves.

What basic satisfiers can be designed to meet these most urgent poverties? How can such satisfiers be made to have as wide an impact as possible to become synergic satisfiers? Should they come from outside? To what extent can they be generated internally? This kind of collective and interactive analysis will demonstrate the potential capacity for local self-reliance.

Does access exist to the required economic goods and other material resources? What kinds of processes would be appropriate for obtaining these, given that the community would wish to manage its own affairs as far as possible?

The above methodology would provide a basis for a strategy that encourages a self-reliant, participative and democratic development process in which local and other communities have a significant voice in initiating, planning, implementing and controlling their own development.

## 4. Basic needs, human scale development and the RDP

The above outline of broad postwar development thinking; of basic needs and its development record; and, of human scale development as a particularly thoughtful and incisive example of people-centred development; provides a useful background against which to comment on a few aspects of the RDP.

Four broad but critical issues (amongst others) need to be addressed.

- What vision of development lies at the core of the RDP? What does it regard as the essential content of development as opposed to its form?
- The reconstruction dimension of the RDP clearly aims at transforming social structures. But so do all the major post-war development visions, each with its own orientation based on its objectives and favoured mechanisms. What is the particular orientation of reconstruction in the RDP?
- If meeting basic needs is a top priority, how is it to be addressed? Will it be translated in practice into empowering the genuinely poor through stimulating increased self-reliance, or will it degenerate into little more than institutionalised charity ultimately aimed at empowering the politicians of the day?

- Can the frustrating constraint of limited resources be relieved and, if so, how?

All the above are important issues which have proved to be both sensitive and controversial in the more recent development history of developing countries. A new South Africa is not likely to prove any exception to this general rule.

#### 4.1 The RDP vision of development

There can be little doubt that the RDP's view of the development process in society, is firmly based on the more recent progressive tradition of human or people-centred development. In the historical South African context, it is both a very significant and a refreshingly new vision.

The following extracts and statements from the published RDP programme, which is referred to as the 'RDP Base Document' in the government's RDP White Paper (South Africa, 1994) reflect its core vision of development.

'The central objective of our RDP is to improve the quality of life of all South Africans, and in particular the most poor and marginalised sections of our communities... This (latter) objective should be realised through a process of empowerment which gives the poor control over their own lives and increases their ability to mobilise sufficient resources, including from the democratic government where necessary. The RDP reflects a commitment to grass-roots, bottom-up development which is owned and driven by communities and their representative organisations' (ANC, 1994: 15).

'The document is the result of many months of consultation within the ANC, its Alliance partners and other mass organisations in the wider civil society... The RDP was not drawn up by experts... but by the very people that will be part of its implementation... We are encouraging local communities to begin developing their own priorities' (ANC, 1994: Preface).

Elaborating on one of the RDP principles namely 'a people-driven process' it is stated that 'development is not about the delivery of goods to a passive citizenry. It is about active involvement and growing empowerment' (South Africa, 1994:5).

'A system of hand-outs for the unemployed should be avoided' (ANC, 1994: 18).

'Growth... is commonly seen as the priority that must precede development... In this view, development is a deduction from growth. The RDP breaks decisively with this approach. If growth is defined as an increase in output, then it is, of course, a basic goal. However, where that growth occurs, how sustainable it is, how it is distributed, the degree to which it contributes to building long-term productive capacity and human resource development, and what impact it has on the environment, are the crucial questions when considering reconstruction and development... The RDP integrates growth, development, reconstruction and redistribution into a unified programme' (ANC, 1994: 6).

#### 4.2 How far does the people-centred vision of the RDP really go?

The extent to which the RDP embraces a truly comprehensive human-centred vision can be measured against the five fundamental principles of such a vision outlined earlier. A comparative evaluation of this kind is not merely of academic interest. It could also serve to judge the understanding, sincerity and scope of the RDP commitment to a process of genuine people-centred development.

##### 4.2.1 Needs-orientated, involving both material and non-material needs

Despite the emphasis on 'actively involving people and their organisations in articulating their aspiration' (ANC, 1994: Preface) this is, perhaps, paradoxically, not as strong a dimension



of the RDP as it might seem or as is clearly intended.

The main reason lies in the adoption of the conventional and materialistic interpretation of human needs as representing largely a desire for economic goods and services. Such a narrow interpretation of needs makes it very difficult to address both material and non-material needs in a systematic and integrated manner.

This shortcoming is particularly relevant in the major programme aimed at 'meeting basic needs'. It leaves the government at all levels wide open to popular demands to play Father Christmas and simply hand out goods and services to the poor. Such an outcome would not be empowerment but institutionalised charity.

#### 4.2.2 Endogenous

The requirement of 'stemming from the heart of each society which defines in sovereignty its values and its vision of the future' is a formidable one. In a diverse, multicultural society such as South Africa, which has been described as 'deeply divided' by many international experts, the kind of consensus implied by such a guideline would clearly be hard to obtain.

Nevertheless, the RDP can be said to have originated inside South Africa, and not, for example, from the World Bank or the United Nations. As stated clearly in the preface to the RDP base document, it is a framework that was widely discussed mainly within the 'mass democratic movement'. Although some useful public debate has already occurred, the same Preface also states that 'we will now consult very widely to ensure that all considered views are available to the policy-making process'.

This admission and the emphasis on the need for nation-building throughout the RDP, clearly shows an awareness that there is some considerable way to go before this demanding principle of genuinely human-centred development would truly apply in South Africa as a whole.

More particularly, the extent to which local and regional diversity would have to be accommodated and encouraged to give effect and impact to this principle, is a thorny issue. It is not clear to what extent the RDP accepts all its implications. Yet, the fact is that worldwide the modern nation state has lost much of its earlier appeal because it has *inter alia* simply become too large and bureaucratic to resolve the problems of its citizens on the ground.

#### 4.2.3 Self-reliant

The main thrust here is to avoid dependency and 'vicious circles of poverty' by promoting self-reliant development processes, especially at local levels.

The RDP's strong emphasis on 'a people-driven process', 'active involvement' and 'growing empowerment of communities' (see earlier quotations) clearly show that it regards the promotion of greater self-reliance as an important component of its development vision. Indeed, it appears to be aware that 'empowerment' and 'self-reliance' are not concepts but practical processes.

Yet there is a similar danger here as indicated earlier. Human scale development makes it clear that the best way of stimulating self-reliance is through the endogenous generation of satisfiers by communities themselves. These satisfiers should, moreover, become synergic processes or satisfiers aimed at the satisfaction of fundamental human needs, not needs defined conventionally and superficially as in the RDP. Otherwise efficiency cannot be combined with synergy to relieve resource constraints.

Fundamental needs and their appropriate satisfiers can only be articulated from within a community. In practice, however, 'economic needs' and the goods and services that satisfy them, can and often are planned and controlled by government officials under pressure to deliver on political promises. If so, development inevitably degenerates into the quick fix of delivering very visible material things from the top down rather than focusing

on bottom-up delivery which enables people to develop themselves.

Such a top-down approach would also increase the dependence of communities on external political patronage and is, surely, the opposite of stimulating greater self-reliance.

#### 4.2.4 Ecologically sound

Concern for 'the resources of the biosphere' is not one of the six principles on which the RDP is based. It is mentioned under the principle of 'linking reconstruction and development' with the pattern of economic growth which should involve *inter alia* questions about impact on the environment (ANC, 1994: 6). In the context of mining, there is mention of environmental impact studies and a suggestion that 'existing legislation must be strengthened to ensure that our environment is protected' (ANC, 1994: 102).

It is also stated (ANC, 1994: 15) that 'the RDP is committed to a programme of sustainable development which addresses the needs of our people without compromising the interests of future generations'. This would seem to imply a concern for ecological constraints.

It is difficult, however, to escape the impression that 'serious concern about the potential of local and global ecosystems and the outer limits it imposes on present and future generations' is not afforded the importance in the RDP that it deserves.

#### 4.2.5 Based on structural transformation

The main purpose of transformation or restructuring should be to realise the underlying conditions for self-management and participation in decision making. Without such a base, the four goals above could not be achieved.

In terms of an approach of 'direct democracy' these underlying conditions would require an enabling environment in which decision-making is decentralised to the lowest responsible level. 'The aim should be to empower

ordinary people to take charge of their lives, to make communities responsible for their development, and to make governments listen to the people' (World Bank, 1990).

The effective use of such new freedoms and responsibilities might require further restructuring to improve access to resources, especially by the poor. Access to funding, skills and information is of key importance in this sphere.

One of the six principles of the RDP is the 'democratisation of South Africa'. In this context it states the following: 'Thoroughgoing democratisation of our society is... absolutely integral to the whole RDP... Above all, the people affected must participate in decision-making. Democratisation must begin to transform both the state and civil society. Democracy is not confined to process enabling everyone to contribute to reconstruction and development' (ANC, 1994: 7).

This certainly represents in principle a non-authoritarian and non-prescriptive approach to development and the institutional restructuring required to promote it as a people-centred process. 'Direct democracy' appears to be implied although it is not mentioned explicitly.

However, as in the case of the other principles of human-centredness outlined above, the real test will come in the arena of practical implementation.

Indeed, some of the particular programmes and suggestions for institutional restructuring and legislation outlined in the RDP come across as much more prescriptive than the above broad principles would suggest. Again, only time will tell.

### 4.3 The approach to basic needs in the RDP base document

Meeting basic needs is the first of five major policy programmes of the RDP. Its importance is clearly indicated by the statement that '[t]he first priority is

to begin to meet the basic needs of people' (ANC, 1994: 7).

The RDP approach can be outlined as follows:

*Definition.* 'An enormous proportion of very basic needs are presently unmet. In attacking poverty and deprivation, the RDP aims to set South Africa firmly on the road to eliminating hunger, providing land and housing to all our people, providing access to safe water and sanitation for all, ensuring the availability of affordable and sustainable energy resources, eliminating illiteracy, raising the quality of education and training for children and adults, protecting the environment, and improving our health services and making them accessible to all' (ANC, 1994: 14).

*Programmes.* In more concrete terms, this agenda would include 'programmes to redistribute a substantial amount of land to landless people, build over one million houses, provide clean water and sanitation to all, electrify 2,5 million new homes and provide access for all to affordable health care and telecommunications. To the above list should be added various specific programmes to address education and training.

*Implementation approach.* In terms of implementation it is indicated that 'our people should be involved in these (major infrastructural) programmes by being made part of the decision-making on where infrastructure is located, by being employed in its construction and by being empowered to manage and administer these large-scale programmes' (ANC, 1994: 8).

*Strategy.* The strategy for meeting basic needs involves four elements (ANC, 1994: 15-6):

- creating opportunities for all South Africans to develop to their full potential
- increasing productive employment
- better access to basic physical and social services
- establishing a social security system and other safety nets to protect the poor and other vulnerable groups.

The key issues that need to be addressed in this context are:

- How are basic needs interpreted and defined in the RDP?
- Who constitutes the target audience?
- Who articulates and determines such needs?

In practice, these questions are often inseparable, but for purposes of clarity they will be discussed in the order indicated above.

#### 4.3.1 The definition of basic needs in the base document

The broad approach is in line with the more complex version of basic needs suggested by the ILO (quoted above). There is indeed a serious attempt to place basic needs 'within a context of national independence, the dignity of individuals and people, and their freedom to chart their destiny without hindrance'.

The extent to which the latter, non-material dimensions of basic needs have been adequately addressed in terms of the multi-cultural South African context, is open to doubt, as earlier comment in this paper has indicated. However, the RDP approach is a considerable advance on the usual simple or shopping list version of basic needs adopted in many developing countries.

Nevertheless, the definition and understanding of basic needs in the RDP require further comment.

Firstly, the definition goes well beyond the conventional focus on 'basics only' in the five core areas of drinking water and sewerage, nutrition, shelter, health and education. In fact, its content appears to be determined much more by quality of life considerations derived from the current living standards enjoyed by the First World sector, that is the majority of whites, a large proportion of the Indian and so-called coloured population groups and a minority of blacks.

For example, the range and standards outlined exceed by a substantial margin the minimum necessary for subsistence as defined by the ILO in its 1976 Declaration or as indicated by Streeten and Burki, the architects of the basic needs approach.

Secondly, quite apart from the range and standards of basic needs that the RDP would seek to address, its definition of needs follows the traditional growth-centred approach of expressing these directly as desires or wants for particular economic goods and services. The alternative indirect approach of focusing first and foremost on the fundamental needs of communities and determining their demand for particular goods and services as a derived outcome of such a deeper-going exercise, is not considered at all.

The result is that basic needs address mainly the fundamental need for subsistence and largely ignores all the others. Furthermore, the satisfiers are directly economic goods and services. This implies that only singular satisfiers are likely to be employed and the opportunity to release considerable social energy through the use of multiple-impact processes or synergic satisfiers may well be lost. A focus on both fundamental needs and objects is crucial if people are to grow rather than only production.

#### 4.3.2 The target audience

Given the expansive definition of basic needs in the RDP base document, it is not clear what section of the South African population is targeted. Certainly it is not directed only at the poorest of the poor, say the bottom 20 or 30 per cent of the population by income who are in fact to be found largely in rural areas.

Do the many references to 'our people' in the base document suggest that the target audience is 'all those disadvantaged by apartheid', that is the black majority in South Africa whether they are genuinely poor or not?

In view of the considerable demand placed on resources by the RDP, it

seems necessary to distinguish between meeting the basic needs of the genuinely poor and meeting apartheid backlogs more generally. Serious attention should be given to identify much more clearly who 'the most poor and marginalised sections of our communities' (ANC, 1994: 15) really are and to tailoring the meeting of genuine basic needs first, accordingly.

#### 4.3.3 Who determines and articulates basic needs?

In its statement of vision and objectives in the base document there is mention of 'a process of empowerment which gives the poor control over their lives and increases their ability to mobilise sufficient development resources, including from the democratic government where necessary. The RDP reflects a commitment to grass-roots, bottom-up development which is owned and driven by communities and their respective organisations' (ANC, 1994: 15).

The intention is clear: the onus is on communities themselves to determine and articulate their needs, however defined. The role of government then becomes a facilitative and enabling one, to be guided by the proposals put forward by local-level communities.

This is about as participative and non-authoritarian an approach as one could possibly wish for. It is therefore a little disturbing to note the change in tone and language when it comes to particular programmes. 'Must' and 'will' rather than 'guide' or 'facilitate' become the predominant mode of expression.

Some examples are given below.

- 'The democratic government must play a leading role in building an economy' (ANC, 1994: 18).
- 'The RDP must implement a fundamental land reform programme. This programme must be demand driven and must aim to supply residential and productive land to the poorest section of the rural population and aspirant farmers' (ANC, 1994: 20).

- 'As a minimum, all housing must provide protection from weather, a durable structure, and reasonable living space and privacy. A house must include sanitary facilities, stormwater drainage, a household energy supply ... and conventional access to clear water. Moreover, it must provide for secure tenure in a variety of forms. Upgrading of existing housing must be accomplished with these standards in mind' (ANC, 1994: 23).

These examples should support an uneasy feeling that in its practical implementation, the RDP might well become much more authoritarian and prescriptive than its overall development philosophy would indicate.

#### 4.4 **The importance of non-conventional resources for local development**

One of the main tensions around the RDP derives from the great disparity between limited resources, on the one hand, and the huge challenges that have to be met, on the other. In this juxtaposition, 'resources' are viewed in the conventional manner, ie as inputs mainly of capital and labour for the production process at large. A characteristic of human scale development is its emphasis on generating additional, non-conventional resources to enhance the process of development, particularly at local community level.

The basis of this new emphasis is a reinterpretation of the concept of human work. Historical experience indicates that 'work' constitutes much more than a factor of production: 'it fosters creativity, mobilises social energy, preserves communal identity, deploys solidarity, and utilises organisational experience and popular knowledge for the satisfaction of individual and collective needs' (Max-Neef, 1989:67).

Thus a broader conception of work would emphasise that there are many qualitative dimensions of work (labour) that cannot be accounted for in the quantitative production functions of

orthodox economics. They are, in fact, intangible elements that are not definable or measurable in units similar to those used for conventional resources.

In practice, these qualitative dimensions are especially evident in the activities undertaken by small local organisations and social movements.

#### *Beyond conventional economic resources*

Conventional economic resources are essentially restricted to capital and labour (work) as instruments or factors of production made available in order to earn a (money) reward or return. Other possible resources especially relevant to the local community level are the following:

- social sensitivity and awareness
- general organisational experience and practical knowledge
- solidarity and the ability to provide mutual aid
- popular creativity
- dedication and commitment (both from internal and external agents)
- expertise and training provided by supporting agencies (at low cost).

These non-conventional resources are important because, in principle, they represent additional sources of human energy. Such forms of energy or vitality, largely social in nature, can generally be mobilised more easily within local communities through 'work' (broadly interpreted). This is why non-conventional resources are particularly relevant for development at the local level.

#### *Characteristics of conventional and non-conventional resources*

A number of special features distinguish non-conventional from conventional resources.

- Non-conventional resources are depleted by non-use: if used they grow and expand. The opposite situation prevails for conventional resources.
- Non-conventional resources are plentiful whereas conventional resources are typically characterised by scarcity.

- Non-conventional resources have a considerable capacity to generate social as opposed to individual energy and therefore have much inherent synergic potential.

### *Complementarity of conventional and non-conventional resources*

Using non-conventional resources can contribute much to the improved performance of conventional resources, especially of capital (in the form of physical facilities).

Many development projects or programmes which enjoy adequate financial support have nevertheless failed to achieve much impact. Often this is because of their inability to motivate people and to stimulate the endogenous potential of the groups that they intend to benefit.

Indeed it can be said generally that any conventional resource that is not supported in a community by the emergence of non-conventional resources which the community decides to mobilise, will end up either in failure or in having limited development impact.

### *Non-conventional resources and democratic processes*

Non-conventional resources will be important instruments for reconstruction and development if they become rooted in (local) communities and 'stored' in their historical and cultural traditions. In essence, it is only a community itself which can expand these resources and make their use viable because they are inherent in the community context. Thus the strengthening of non-conventional resources also involves strengthening community participation and self-reliance. These are, in turn, important dimensions of a substantially decentralised form of democracy.

If the latter objective is not seriously pursued it would be difficult to implement a policy of activating the

widespread use of non-conventional resources to supplement and thus relieve the considerable pressure on conventional resources in the fight against poverty.

Development on a human scale needs to be supported by democracy on a human scale.

### *Policy to encourage the use of non-conventional resources*

A policy that promotes resources for local development (which implies decentralisation and participation) and from local organisations and groups (which implies using non-conventional resources) is in many ways the cornerstone of reconstruction and development 'from the bottom upward'. An important role of the state would then become one of favouring development geared to the strengthening of local spaces.

This is unfamiliar territory, especially in South Africa. The challenge for policy is to explore practical possibilities along the following lines.

- To identify and multiply the many useful initiatives that (community-level) civil society creates from within itself, through managing the availability of resources in a new and innovative manner.
- To identify and broaden those initiatives which contain a greater potential in terms of using non-conventional resources.
- To identify and motivate social actors capable of mobilising unconventional resources to good development effect.

Such a policy approach would not only tolerate the many diversities of South African society but would aim to transform these positively into a promoter of development. The key is to advocate on the political front serious consideration of local (and regional) interests, especially in respect of poorer communities.

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## 5. Implementing the dynamic RDP vision of development: How can it be made more effective in practice?

A central proposition was emphasised earlier, that the way in which human needs are understood and the role and attributes ascribed to possible satisfiers of such needs, are crucial in determining development strategy. The particular perspective adopted will determine the chances of having real impact on satisfying human needs.

The RDP states clearly that its vision is people-centred development. Moreover, addressing poverty through meeting basic needs is a first priority. However, the implementation of such worthy intentions has in the past proved to be problematical and difficult.

Against the background of what has been said earlier about needs-based development generally and some comments on the RDP specifically, the following suggestions might be worth considering.

### 5.1 Promote a richer, more fundamental understanding of human needs

There is a strong case for defining human needs in deeper, more fundamental terms rather than simply as wants or desires for particular objects, goods or services. Such an approach allows satisfiers (processes related to structuring the many facets of people living their daily lives) to come in between fundamental needs and material objects, thus greatly enriching the conventional mechanistic, one-to-one manner in which human needs are usually addressed.

#### *Combining efficiency with synergy*

A particular virtue of this approach is that it relieves resource constraints as conventionally interpreted. By focusing

on social processes with multiple impact (synergic satisfiers), conventional resources are stretched to achieve much more in terms of need satisfaction. The basic idea is to stimulate the creative and synergic potential that exists but often lies dormant, especially at local community levels. Combining orthodox efficiency with synergy could go a long way towards easing the tensions in the RDP induced by the huge perceived gap between limited resources and very high expectations.

#### *Effective conflict resolution*

It could also make an important contribution to persuading local-level communities to move away from the currently prevalent perception that development is actually no more than providing physical facilities. In many poor (urban) communities, caught up in a tough daily struggle against poverty, this perception has proved to be a dangerous one. Access to and control over such resources, regarded as enduringly scarce, has all too easily become a matter of life and death, to be fought over violently by the holders of power within a community.

In these situations conflict resolution is not only essential but if it is to have any real impact has to focus on deeper human needs and the generation of broader satisfiers by the community itself. This appears to be a more promising approach to resolving the serious dilemma of no development without peace; no peace without development, which is so characteristic of many local-level communities in South Africa today.

### 5.2 Pursue the concept of basic satisfiers rather than basic needs and tailor government interventions accordingly

If the above perspective is accepted, 'basic needs' require to be replaced by 'basic satisfiers', which is a more positive and development-orientated concept to work with. As indicated earlier, basic satisfiers are processes, not physical facilities, aimed at addressing

those fundamental poverties or deprivations that a particular community feels or experiences most urgently in their daily lives. These may go well beyond the usual material poverty of subsistence only. In South Africa, for example, protection is sure to feature prominently as well.

Since the approach pertinently involves processes which shape people's lives, there is a much better chance of coming up with satisfiers that have a multiple (rather than the usual singular) impact on these most urgent needs of a community. This is especially true since every community has to express and articulate such critical fundamental needs itself and design appropriate basic satisfiers. Since the whole approach is inherently a collective one, it automatically stimulates participation with and by communities.

Assistance from trained facilitators may, however, well be needed to guide these collective activities in the desired direction. This points to an important training priority in drawing up budgets for addressing the basics of quality of life for the poor.

#### ***The issue of quantifying basic needs***

The basic satisfiers approach also helps to place the current overemphasis on quantifying basic needs in proper perspective. It would certainly be useful, for example for budgetary planning, to have estimates of the total cost of goods and services required to address the material poverty of subsistence.

However, a deeper understanding of human needs adds two important dimensions. Firstly, it focuses also on a number of non-material poverties that may arise from the severely inadequate satisfaction of fundamental needs other than subsistence, for example, the broader need for protection. Secondly, at this fundamental level poverties can only be articulated by particular communities themselves. Government cannot do this by itself.

It follows that exercises in quantification should not be allowed to detract from the developmental focus of

participative processes of interaction with communities. Such participation represents, in fact, the essential platform or developing people as opposed to increasing their dependence on external political forces by handing out 'services' or physical facilities to them.

The problem of poverty simply cannot be resolved in a sustainable manner by throwing money at it.

### **5.3 Identify the target market of the genuinely poor more clearly than in the RDP**

As indicated earlier basic needs are very expansively defined in the RDP. In fact, the approach goes well beyond the traditional focus on the genuinely poor. Since available resources, especially from the government sector, are likely to remain restricted in the years ahead, the more accurate identification of the poor in South Africa would be an urgent task.

The criteria used in this process should not concentrate on material subsistence only but should include at least the fundamental need for protection. In identifying communities which have been particularly wracked by violence for whatever reasons, the national Peace Accord structures might usefully be asked to lend a hand.

### **5.4 Address seriously the issue of limited access to resources by the poor**

Effectively breaking out of the vicious circle of poverty often involves more than human capacity building *per se*. Enhancing the capabilities of the poor through improved basic levels of nutrition, health, shelter, education and skills may not be enough.

Continued poverty can also be conditioned by limited access to credit, productive assets, markets, reasonable wages and other resources. A programme of meeting basic needs will therefore have to be augmented by



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particular attention to problems of access to various resources by the poor.

### **5.5 Accept a diversity of development styles rather than a single national style**

Human scale development does not involve making the potential conflict between civil society and the state more acute. On the contrary, it attempts to prove that it is quite possible for the state to assume a positive and useful role by encouraging synergic development processes at the local and regional level. If this should lead to a diversity of styles at these levels instead of a single national style, it is no real problem.

National unity does not mean uniformity. A divided society such as South Africa may achieve a more sound foundation for real solidarity and unity if its wealth of culturally diverse potential is allowed to develop freely and creatively, guided and supported by access to resources and technical backup provided by the government of the day.

### **5.6 Resist the temptation to enforce reconstruction and development processes from the political centre**

A central government that takes a genuinely facilitative and enabling view of its role in the development process generally as well as in addressing the problems of the poor, would be a very new phenomenon in South Africa. It will undoubtedly require much courage and political will on the part of the political leadership to carry it through in practice.

It should be made clear to all citizens that the appropriate role for government is essentially to deliver inputs into the development process so as to enable communities themselves to deliver the outputs that they need. This message should indeed be spread to every corner of the country. If the basic purpose is empowerment and self-reliance rather than charity, that is, developing people rather than handing out physical facilities, such an approach is the only option.

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