

## HANS SINGER'S VISION OF DEVELOPMENT

*(The view of a biographer)*

Hans Singer was one of the earliest development economists to recognize the importance of the human factor in development. This recognition evolved gradually over time. It began with his deep personal experience in working on the Pilgrim Trust unemployment enquiry, during which he lived with the families of the long-term unemployed in the depressed areas of Great Britain (1936-38). It also involved discussions with Archbishop Temple, chairman of the study, who constantly stressed the importance of people in the development of their communities and nations, and the influence of Sir William (later Lord) Beveridge, main adviser to the study, and his value of social welfare and full employment in a free society. It continued and was constantly brought home to him in his work at the United Nations (1947-69). Following Keynes' thesis that economics is not a universal truth applicable to all countries and conditions but a framework of thinking to mould to different circumstances, Hans considered that there can be no 'blueprint' for development applicable to all countries.

A number of common themes permeated throughout Hans' considerable body of work that added up to his vision of development. For him, development is not merely about economic development: it is growth accompanied by structural social and economic change. The starting point should be people, not money and wealth, which gave a whole new perspective on development. Sustained and equitable development depended not on the creation of wealth but on the capacity of people to create wealth. Hence, his insistence on the importance of the human factor in development, and, following from that, on the well-being of children, on education and training, on science and appropriate technology, on employment and income distribution, and the conquest of poverty, and on planning and sound institutions, all viewed in an international context in which trade and aid were conducted with distributive justice and efficiency so that all countries, developing and developed, might flourish and converge, instead of diverge.

In recalling how he developed his analytical abilities, Hans stated: 'One tries to look at the world from the view point of the underdog - of the recipient, the victim. You get insights into the world that are not open to people who look at the world from the top down'. We would do well to emulate this approach.

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*Sir Hans Singer. The Life and Work*

*of a Development Economist*

(Palgrave Macmillan, 2002)