

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: THEORY & PRACTICE

JAMES MIDGLEY



Los Angeles | London | New Delhi
Singapore | Washington DC

1

DEFINING SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Even though the term social development has been in regular use for more than half a century, it is still poorly defined. Today, it is used to mean different things. It is often associated with community-based projects in the developing countries such as microenterprises, women's groups, cooperatives, maternal and child welfare programmes, the provision of safe drinking water and the construction of schools and clinics. It also refers to government policies and programmes concerned with the 'social aspect' of development, such as reducing poverty, increasing literacy, combating malnutrition and improving access to health and education. This usage reflects international efforts to promote the Millennium Development Goals, which were adopted at the United Nations Millennium Summit in New York in 2000. In contrast to this practical approach, the term is also used to connote the achievement of lofty ideals, such as progress, social integration, peace and social justice.

Scholars working in different academic fields have also used the term in different ways. It is closely associated with development studies, where it is perhaps most frequently employed, but it is also influenced by scholarly work in sociology, social work and social policy. Sociologists have used the term to describe a process of 'guided' social change that improves society while some social workers have linked social development to community-based projects. Some have also invoked abstract ideals to characterise the field. As is well known, psychologists employ the term to refer to childhood development. It has also been used in social policy to refer to social improvements brought about by government 'welfare state' initiatives and it also characterises recent discussions among social policy writers on what is called 'welfare developmentalism'.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: THEORY AND PRACTICE

This chapter reviews a number of definitions that have emerged in practice and in academic circles over the years. It offers its own definition and then discusses the key features of this definition; this usage is compatible with the way the term is used in development studies and development practice in the Global South. However, it was noted in the Introduction to this book that social development has also attracted attention in the Western nations, and in some cases, social development interventions such as microenterprises and conditional cash transfers have been replicated in Western countries. Although often regarded as a unique 'Third Worldist' approach, social development is now being adopted in many different parts of the world.

Since the different approaches to definitions discussed in this chapter were formulated in an historic context, some of the issues raised here will be elaborated in the book's following chapter which traces the history of social development. As will be shown, the concept of social development evolved in the Global South after the Second World War and reflected the preoccupation of colonial officials and nationalist independence leaders with economic modernisation and raising standards of living. The definition of social development that emerged at the time also reflected conceptual and ideological interpretations that will be examined in more depth in Part II of this book.

Approaches to definition

The term 'social development' is comprised of two words – *social* and *development* – both of which inform the way it has been defined. Both should be examined in more depth. Today, the term *social* is used by sociologists and other social scientists to refer to human interactions and the complex phenomena that arise from these interactions, such as a large number of groups and associations including the family, neighbourhood associations, formal organisations, communities and even societies. These interactions also give rise to social networks, values, cultures and institutions. The term also has a welfare connotation which alludes to people's well-being and collective efforts to improve social conditions. Both meanings of the term have influenced the way the concept of social development has been used.

The second word, *development*, has a dynamic connotation and refers to a process of change, growth, progress or evolution. Although originally used to connote a process of societal change, the term 'development' has been primarily linked to economic modernisation in the developing countries after the Second World War, where it was originally defined as involving growth and industrialisation. This definition has now been broadened to connote a multifaceted process that comprises social, cultural, gender, political, environmental as well as economic dimensions.

DEFINING SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

It is in this context that the concept of social development has been popularised and will be used in this book.

However, the term 'social development' was not originally used in this way. Instead, it was first employed by sociologists in the late nineteenth century to refer to the processes by which societies evolve from a traditional or 'primitive' state to a modern, advanced level of 'civilisation'. This approach was inspired by Darwin's work and his discovery of the way natural selection shapes the complex form of biological life that evolved since primeval times. Sociologists such as Spencer and Sumner and anthropologists such as Morgan and Tylor drew on Darwin's ideas to claim that similar processes govern societal evolution, or 'social development' as it was called. A major figure in evolutionary sociology at the time was Hobhouse, whose book *Social Development* (1924) popularised the term and informed subsequent thinking in the field. He challenged the views of the Social Darwinists, proposing the adoption of social reforms that would modify the harsh effects of social change on vulnerable people. He also disagreed with Marx and Engels, who argued that meaningful change will only be brought about through revolution driven by historical forces. Together with social liberals in Britain, known as the 'New Liberals', he helped inspire the social legislation and social reforms introduced by the British government in the early years of the twentieth century. There were similar developments in the United States where these ideas were promoted by reformers known as the 'Progressives'. Hobhouse's approach to defining social development was subsequently augmented by sociologists concerned with social planning and with what was sometimes called 'guided' social change (Bennis et al., 1961; Chodak, 1973; North, 1932).

It is likely that these ideas influenced the first social development practitioners who launched community-based projects in the rural areas of African and Asian countries in the years following the Second World War. Although development planners and policymakers in these countries drew on ideas from the new field of development economics, those engaged in social welfare activities were likely to turn to sociologists for inspiration and find that notions of evolutionary change and social planning offered a helpful conceptual framework for their work. As will be shown in the next chapter, expatriate social workers who established the first government welfare services in the British colonial territories laid the foundations for social development by introducing community-based projects that combined economic and social activities and emphasised participation in development. Community development was also inspired by the rural reconstruction projects of Gandhi and Tagore in India, which sought to address the problem of rural poverty at the local level.

The colonial authorities in London approved of these developments and it was in this context the term 'social development' was embraced by the British government. In 1954, at a meeting in Cambridge of welfare administrators from

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: THEORY AND PRACTICE

different parts of the Empire, it was formally adopted to refer to social programmes and policies which would, as one official document put it, result in 'nothing less than the whole process of change and advancement of a territory, considered in terms of the progressive well-being of society and the individual' (United Kingdom, Colonial Office, 1954, p. 14). Although this ambitious goal did not accurately reflect the practical community development programmes established at the time, it was the first attempt to formulate a formal definition of social development. It also reflected the desire to promote the modernisation of the newly independent developing countries.

Other scholars, including sociologists and social workers, subsequently defined social development in similar lofty terms. One of the first formal definitions to be offered by a social work scholar, Paiva (1977, p. 323), used this approach to suggest that social development is 'the development of the capacity of people to work continuously for their own and society's welfare'. Another example comes from Omer (1979, p. 15), who defined social development as a process that brings about 'an integrated, balanced and unified social and economic development of society, and one that gives expression to the values of human dignity, equality and social justice'. She goes on to say that social development seeks 'to create humanistic societies committed to achieving peace in the world and progress for all people' (p. 16). A more recent example is Aspalter and Singh's (2008, p. 2) definition of social development as planned and directed change that 'enables people to achieve greater happiness, satisfaction and a peaceful life'.

While definitions of this kind are unobjectionable, they fail to identify the projects and programmes that can achieve these abstract goals and are of limited practical value. Accordingly, they have been criticised by some scholars for offering a set of 'nebulous aspirations and heuristic notions' that are 'hortatory rather than prescriptive' (Lloyd, 1982, pp. 44–45). Nevertheless, social workers played a major role in spreading social development ideas. In 1972, they founded the International Consortium for Social Development, which launched *Social Development Issues*, a leading journal in the field, and actively promoted social development for many years through professional conferences and exchange programmes (Meinert, 1991). These contributions built on the pioneering work of the social workers who introduced community development projects in the Global South during the colonial period.

Some social workers have formulated definitions that are less abstract and hortatory and more focused on practical matters. Hollister (1977) and Spergel (1978) equate social development with community organisation, policy analysis and programme administration and, in a more recent definition, Miah (2008) emphasises the role of microenterprise and microfinance activities. Midgley and Conley (2010) also highlight the practical aspects of social development and urge the adoption of what they call 'investment strategies' in social work practice. Today, most social workers involved in social development are

DEFINING SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

primarily concerned with community-based interventions that mobilise local people to participate in a variety of projects designed to improve local conditions. Although Pawar and Cox (2010) also approach the field from a social work perspective and emphasise community-level interventions, they deal with a number of conceptual issues that have broader relevance to the field.

Scholars in mainstream development studies who have offered definitions of social development seldom recognise social workers' contribution and some, such as Green (2002), dismiss what she described as a 'welfarist conception', which she alleges is primarily concerned with the provision of services to needy people. However, she appears to be unaware of the contribution of social workers to community development and social policy which transcends a limited concern for poor people. Her own definition draws on an eclectic mix of ideas from social anthropology, social policy, public management and development studies, and links social development to the work of international development agencies concerned with poverty alleviation, meeting basic needs and enhancing community participation in development projects and programmes. This is similar to definitions formulated by social workers and, as noted earlier, social development is often associated with community activities of this kind.

The community, project-based approach to defining social development has been augmented by the community participation approach (Choudry et al., 2012; Cornwall, 2011; United Nations, 1975), which contends that meaningful social change can only be achieved when the social structures that perpetuate poverty, inequality and oppression are challenged by ordinary people and ultimately dismantled. This definition prioritises activism, especially at the local level, and concepts such as *conscientization*, 'empowerment' and 'transformative social change' are widely used to challenge those who use their wealth and power to oppress women, ethnic minorities and the poor. Grassroots community activism is augmented by social action at the national level and large organisations, such as the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India (Chen, 2008) and the Industrial Areas Foundation in the United States (Chambers, 2003), are often cited as an example of this approach. Although many non-governmental and faith-based organisations involved in social development are not overtly committed to activism, they are often commended for offering an alternative to government intervention which is widely regarded as bureaucratic and 'top-down'. Cooperatives are another example of how people can engage collaboratively in economic activities. As will be shown later in this book, they have an ancient history and have played a major role in social development over the years. Popular social movements that campaign for progressive social change also make a major contribution. Although these movements are characterised by a high degree of spontaneity that reflects the anger and desperation of oppressed people, Smith (2008) points out that their energies are often harnessed by organisations that mobilise popular support, lobby

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: THEORY AND PRACTICE

and use a variety of activist tactics to affect change. As Wilson and Whitmore (2000) report with reference to Latin America, social movements have played a major role in promoting social development in the region. Indeed, their definition equates social development with the activities of popular movements and activist groups.

A contrasting approach to definition focuses on the role of governments. This approach defines social development as a process by which improvements in social well-being are brought about through social planning, a variety of legislative mandates, subsidies, redistributive fiscal policies and the activities of social sectoral ministries responsible for education, health, housing and social services. It draws on the idea that democratic governments committed to improving the welfare of their citizens can utilise scientific knowledge and the expertise of technocrats to achieve this goal. This approach is rooted in the writings of Saint Simon and Comte in the nineteenth century and was elaborated by the American economist Veblen as well as other interventionists, including Hobhouse and Keynes. It has informed state directed social development for many years and was championed by leading development economists, such as Myrdal (1970, 1971) and Seers (1969). As will be shown in the next chapter, Myrdal made a major contribution to articulating a statist approach to social development exemplified by what was called the 'unified socio-economic planning' approach.

Although often criticised for being bureaucratic and top-down, governments have also sponsored community social development programmes and projects that have, to varying degrees, promoted people's participation in development. It was noted earlier that the first community development programmes, which were established in the 1950s, combined government resources and expertise with local involvement to create community centres, clinics, feeder roads, schools, water supplies and other projects. At this time, the theoretical principles of 'self-determination' and 'self-help' were articulated to provide a normative basis for community development and, although they proved difficult to implement, have continued to shape community development practice. A major problem was the bureaucratisation of community development and its expropriation by party officials and local elites who often redirected community development resources to serve their own interests. With the subsequent involvement of grassroots organisations and non-governmental organisations, these problems have to some extent been mitigated.

Governments also contributed to social development by establishing social planning units within their central economic development planning agencies and linking the policies of sectoral ministries, such as health, education and social welfare, to national plans. They also enhanced the developmental relevance of the ministries of social welfare that had inherited a remedial, urban-based approach from the colonial period. It was in this context that many governments renamed their social welfare ministries as ministries of social

DEFINING SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

development. This innovation follows the first United Nations meeting of welfare ministers in New York in 1968, when many governments declared their intention to introduce 'developmental' welfare programmes and policies (United Nations, 1969).

The statist definition of social development also reflects the work of international development agencies such as the United Nations, the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The World Bank has also made a major contribution but, as will be shown in the next chapter, its original commitment to government-sponsored social development was replaced in the 1980s by a market-based approach that reflected the growing influence of market liberal ideas as well as changing economic, social and political realities. Nevertheless, the major international development organisations have continued to support government efforts to initiate, direct and fund social development programmes. Government involvement finds expression in the *Commitments* adopted by the member states of the United Nations at the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995, and in the subsequent adoption of the *Millennium Declaration* of 2000, which enshrines the Millennium Development Goals. These are comprised of eight broad goals which are broken down into 18 specific targets, including the reduction of poverty, improvements in school attendance, the promotion of gender equity, reductions in child and maternal mortality and enhanced international cooperation (United Nations, 2005). Today, the Millennium Development Goals exemplify the statist definition of social development.

Definitions by a number of academics also reveal a preference for government intervention. The first major book on social development, published by Jones and Pandey in 1981, favoured a statist approach but also incorporated a community development and other non-governmental initiatives. In this book, Pandey defined social development as a process that results in the 'improvement of the quality of life of people ... a more equitable distribution of resources ... and special measures that will enable marginal groups and communities to move into the mainstream' (Pandey, 1981, p. 33). This definition is in many respects similar to the ideals expressed in the *Copenhagen Declaration* some 15 years later, and it also emphasises the importance of national interventions through the agency of the state. As mentioned earlier, Myrdal and Seers drew attention to the fact that the people of the developing nations were not uniformly poor. While many lived in rural poverty or eked out an existence in the rapidly expanding urban informal settlements, others enjoyed a comfortable lifestyle comparable to that of the upper middle class in the Western nations. The development process, they concluded, had disproportionately benefited political and business elites, the military and the senior civil service, creating a situation known as 'distorted' or 'uneven' or 'unbalanced' development. This occurs when the income and wealth generated by economic growth accrues disproportionately to

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: THEORY AND PRACTICE

elites and to the middle class but fails to raise the standards of living of a sizeable proportion of the population and especially the poorest groups. This idea was developed by Midgley (1995), who argued that the distortions of development can be addressed by harmonising economic and social interventions within a pragmatic, state-directed approach. However, this involves redistributive policies that channel public resources to the population as a whole through social investments (Midgley, 1999).

Although the United Nations and most other international development agencies use the term *social* development, the UNDP prefers the term *human* development. This term is often regarded as a synonym for social development but a closer reading of the organisation's definition reveals an emphasis on individual choice and responsibility (UNDP, 1990) which is not emphasised by the other agencies. The UNDP's definition is contained in the first of a series of influential reports published in 1990 that reflect a preference for interventions that focus on individual households which, the organisation points out, can make rational decisions to enhance their own well-being. As the report puts it, human development is a process of promoting freedom by 'enlarging people's choices' (1990, p. 3). This definition of social development is based on Sen's (1985, 1999) writings and may be contrasted with that of Myrdal and Seers, who propose a much more proactive role for governments. Although the UNDP recognises the need for investments such as education, access to credit and other supports, it avoids the problem of structural inequality and the need for public social investments that are explicitly redistributive. As Nussbaum (2011) points out, the 'human development' approach is concerned with fostering capabilities among individuals so that they can choose what they want to do and be.

The concept of social development has also been used in social policy and welfare state studies to refer to the social improvements brought about in the Western countries by governments in the years following the Second World War. However, these improvements are seldom associated with economic development and instead the role of welfare services in raising standards of living is emphasised. While it is undoubtedly true that the expansion of the so-called 'welfare state' contributed significantly to social improvements at this time, the historical evidence, as Midgley (2008a) points out, reveals that government welfare programmes were originally linked to economic policies and particularly full employment policies. The New Deal in the United States, the implementation of the Beveridge Report in Britain and social democratic welfare initiatives in Northern and Western Europe share many similarities with the statist approach to social development that emerged in the Global South in the 1960s. However, the link between social policy and economic development was subsequently de-emphasised as social policy scholars such as Marshall (1950) and Titmuss (1971, 1974) stressed the role of social rights, altruism and social solidarity in social welfare, implying that social policy should be separated from

DEFINING SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

economic considerations. On the other hand, Piachaud (1989) and Midgley (1995) have questioned the neglect of the economic dimension in Western welfare state thinking, contending that welfare objectives can best be met by harmonising social and economic policies and by emphasising the investment functions of state welfare.

Social development ideas have also been associated with the study of social policy in Asian countries such as Korea, Taiwan, Japan and Singapore, which are sometimes described as 'developmental welfare states' or 'productive welfare states' (Holliday, 2000). In these countries, governments are reported to use social policy to achieve economic goals. This approach, which Kwon (2002) calls 'welfare developmentalism', characterises these nations which are also known in the literature as 'developmental states' (Johnson, 1982; Leftwich, 1995, 2000; Woo-Cumings, 1999) because they have governments that proactively direct the economy to promote industrialisation and mass wage employment. The notion of welfare developmentalism has recently attracted attention in European welfare circles and contributed to efforts to extend Esping-Andersen's (1990) widely cited typology of welfare regimes to other parts of the world by categorising the East Asian countries as productive welfare regimes (Gough, 2004). However, the concept of welfare developmentalism is still poorly defined and, as Wah and Lee (2010) point out, is often confused with a 'workfare' approach, by which disadvantaged people in some East Asian countries are coerced into the labour market without having the supports they need to succeed. They challenge this erroneous view and argue that social investments that restore the 'social' in the social development approach should be more widely employed.

In recent years, definitions of social development have emphasised the importance of social investment and the way they enhance the functioning of individuals, families and communities. Social investments are 'productivist' in that they generate returns not only to those who benefit from these investments but also to the economy and the wider society. However, like the notion of welfare developmentalism, both concepts are used loosely. Esping-Andersen (1992) was one of the first to use the concept of productivism in his characterisation of social policy in Sweden, which, he points out, fosters full employment through education, job training and other human capital investment as well as extensive childcare and healthcare services that support full employment. This approach promotes a healthy, well-educated and productive population that enjoys a high standard of living; it also generates the resources needed to invest in future generations. However, Esping-Andersen (1990) has also claimed that the Nordic welfare states decommodify labour by delinking social benefits from work requirements. In a discussion of productivism in these countries, Dahl and his colleagues (2001) reconcile this apparent contradiction by showing that the region's governments alternate between periods of productivism and decommodification. These ideas have been used by some Western social policy writers

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: THEORY AND PRACTICE

who associate social investment with human capital and labour activation programmes (Giddens, 1998; Jenson, 2010; Morel et al., 2012).

The notion of social investment has also been used in development studies. Schultz (1962, 1981) popularised the need for investments in education and nutrition as an integral part of economic development policy and his ideas were subsequently adopted by international development organisations (Watt, 2000; World Bank, 1995). Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2011) do not specifically use the term 'social investment' but their notion of 'capability enhancement' shares some similarities with the social investment approach. More recently, Grant (2012, p. 16) used the concept with reference to non-profit organisations, arguing that effective philanthropy transcends charitable giving and 'maximizes the social rate of return' to the people, groups and communities they serve. Midgley (1999) and his colleagues (Midgley & Sherraden, 2009; Midgley & Tang, 2001) offer a broader interpretation of the concepts of productivism and social investment by examining a number of investment-oriented practice strategies, such as those discussed in Part III of this book. As will be shown, these include human capital programmes of various kinds, employment creation projects, microenterprise and microfinance, social capital and community-based programmes, asset accumulation interventions and social protection, among others. In addition to fostering social investment, these practice strategies link economic and social programmes and promote inclusivity and participation.

A final approach to defining social development comes from market liberal economists who contend that social development can best be achieved by integrating needy people into market-based economic activities. This argument has not been popular in social development circles but it has gained some support in recent years, as the writings of de Soto (1989, 2000), Lal (1983, 2006) and Prahalad (2005) have been widely disseminated. These scholars reject the idea that governments should assume responsibility for social development and argue instead that the state should restrict its role to facilitating the effective functioning of markets through deregulation, lowering taxes, promoting entrepreneurship and creating a legal environment in which businesses can flourish. In addition, Prahalad believes that exposing poor people to commercial products will promote consumption, change traditional attitudes and integrate them into the market with beneficial results. These scholars also deny that there is any difference between economic and social development, and claim that market-based economic policies will on their own enhance social well-being. An important proponent of this view was Friedman (1989), who, in a rare definition of social development by a market liberal economist, argued that the creation of a vibrant capitalist economy that generates rapid economic growth and wage employment will contribute more effectively to social development than governmental programmes.

Birdsall (1993), a former World Bank economist, also argues for the integration of economic and social policies but from a somewhat different perspective.

DEFINING SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

She points out that economists are increasingly involved in designing, implementing and evaluating social programmes with the result that the distinction between economic and social policies has been blurred. She also notes that social expenditures bring economic returns and that 'investing in social development is good economics' (p. 19). This idea has since been reiterated by the Bank and other international agencies and was recently emphasised in its *World Development Report* of 2012, which addresses gender issues, contending that enhancing gender equality is sound economic policy. As Birdsall's definition suggests, economists do indeed play a major role in social development today and while many social development scholars agree on the integration of the economic, social and other dimensions of development, few accept Friedman's insistence that social development is nothing more than a market-driven economic development process.

Towards a definition

These very different approaches to defining social development reflect the diverse normative beliefs of scholars and practitioners. They also reveal the rich diversity of ideas that find expression in social development theory and practice today. However, these definitions prioritise different types of intervention and, accordingly, no single, agreed-upon definition has yet emerged. Since there is a need for a broad definition that incorporates social development's key features, it will be defined in this book as *a process of planned social change designed to promote the well-being of the population as a whole within the context of a dynamic multifaceted development process*. Like most other definitions, it has limitations but it does seek to be sufficiently general to capture the essence of the social development perspective as revealed in the definitions reviewed earlier. Although different aspects of this definition will be discussed again in the subsequent chapters of this book, some of its key aspects should be highlighted here.

First, the concept of social development invokes the notion of *process*. Although this may seem self-evident, the dynamic nature of social development and its focus on transformative change should be stressed. Social development may be contrasted with static approaches which involve the immediate transfer of resources without requiring a longer-term commitment to changing pre-existing conditions. For example, government welfare services are often concerned with the provision of services to passive recipients and do not address underlying problems. Similarly, social work professionals frequently provide short-term services or crisis counselling to clients. This also reflects a far older charity approach, which involves the immediate provision of aid to those in need. None evoke a longer-term sense of process that produces progressive

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: THEORY AND PRACTICE

social change. Another perhaps more prescient example is the statement by Dr Unni Karunakara, the International President of the international non-governmental organisation Doctors Without Borders, who criticised international donors for responding to the famine in Somalia in 2011 in an *ad hoc* way without seeking to remedy its root causes (*Guardian Weekly*, 2011). Famines, Dr Karunakara argues, cannot be solved through immediate short-term relief but require longer-term solutions that eradicate their causes.

Second, the process of social change in social development is *progressive* in nature. Although social change has historically been understood as a regressive process involving a decline from a past 'Golden Age' or as cyclical involving a never-ending process of improvement and decline, it is now more widely regarded as a process involving steady improvements in social conditions. It was primarily the social thinkers of the Renaissance and Enlightenment who popularised the progressive interpretation, promoting the idea that societies evolve along an upward trajectory to higher levels of prosperity, knowledge and civilisation. In social development, the progressive notion of social change can be viewed conceptually as involving three ideal typical stages: first, a pre-existing social condition social development seeks to change; second, the process of change itself; and, finally, the end state in which goals are realised. In practical terms, social development is concerned with the projects, programmes, policies and plans that promote progressive change. They are the 'how' in social development's 'from what to what and how' sequence. These ideas will be discussed in more detail later in this book.

Some social development writers use the term 'transformation' to describe the social development process, emphasising the way it challenges existing social conditions. Although these accounts often imply that transformative change involves conflict and even revolutionary action, it will be shown later that social development practice has generally preferred an incremental or gradualist approach which nevertheless transforms those existing conditions that are inimical to human well-being. This approach is less reliant on ideological certainties than on pragmatically testing different interventions. This does not mean that social development scholars and practitioners are unconcerned about injustice and oppression or that they do not challenge entrenched power structures. Nor do they reject the need for activism; in fact, activism has a long history in social development. However, while activism is an integral part of social development, providing a vital mechanism for challenging those in power and constraining the excesses of the market, some believe that it should be a primary and even dominant social development strategy. They insist that authentic change can only be achieved through conflict and reject the argument that an incremental approach, which is incorporated in the major social development practice strategies, can achieve transformative change. However, as will be argued in the last chapter of the book, significant changes in people's well-being have been produced through the pragmatic and incremental social development process.

DEFINING SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Third, the social development process forms a part of a larger *multifaceted process* comprised of economic, social, political, cultural, environmental, gender and other dimensions which are integrated and harmonised. This is particularly pertinent to social development practice where economic, social and other interventions are linked and social investments are utilised to promote social well-being. The multifaceted nature of the process of change is encapsulated in what Midgley (1995) described as the three axioms of social development. These require, first, that organisational and institutional arrangements be created by which social development interventions are harmonised with economic activities and the other dimensions of the wider development process. The second axiom requires that economic policies and programmes should be sustainable and specifically directed at improving social well-being. It also requires that people participate fully in the development process. The third axiom requires that social policies and programmes should contribute to economic development. This latter idea finds expression in the concepts of *social investment* and *productivism* mentioned earlier, both of which play a vital role in social development.

Fourth, the process of social development is *interventionist* in that it requires human agency in the form of projects, programmes, policies and plans that achieve social development goals. The proponents of social development reject the idea that social improvements occur naturally as a result of the workings of the economic market or because of natural or inbuilt historical forces. They believe that deliberate efforts are needed to enhance people's well-being. Human beings are not swept along haphazardly by events, but are able to influence their own future in the context of wider social, economic and political changes and, accordingly, the role of agents who promote change through social development practice is emphasised. They include individuals, households, grassroots associations, non-governmental organisations, faith-based organisations, communities, commercial providers and government ministries. Social development interventions are also implemented on different levels, including the household, community, regional and national levels. Often social development practice has a special focus in that many projects and programmes seek to enhance social well-being within specific socio-spatial settings, such as rural communities, inner-city areas and geographic regions. In addition, as efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals reveal, social development is also promoted at the international level.

In addition to involving different agents, social development utilises a large number of projects, programmes, policies and plans known generically as 'interventions'. As shown in Part III of this book, these interventions are organised and channelled through more systematic and coherent modalities that will be called 'practice strategies'. As mentioned earlier, they range from human capital projects, such as childcare centres, to microenterprises. They incorporate many different

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: THEORY AND PRACTICE

social development projects and programmes and are the means by which social development goals are met. Social development's practice strategies are informed by normative theories that reflect wider values, beliefs and ideologies. As will be discussed, a number of normative perspectives which shape the different practice strategies will be discussed. They include the livelihoods, community, enterprise, gender and statist perspectives which shape the different practice strategies. In addition, they draw on the wider Western ideologies of individualism, collectivism and populism, and offer very different prescriptions of achieving social development goals. Although most social development scholars and practitioners are committed to one of these normative perspectives and either ignore or dismiss the others, it has been argued that a pragmatic position that seeks to utilise their respective contributions should be adopted. As will be discussed in final chapter of this book, it is possible to forge a pluralistic normative conception that accommodates the role of diverse institutions, including the family, market, community and state, as well as different agents and practice strategies.

Fifth, the social development process is *productivist* in that practice interventions function as investments that contribute positively to economic development. Because they are based on *social investments*, they generate rates of return to the individuals, households and communities that benefit from these investments as well as to the wider society. These principles are well established in social development and development studies generally, but have not enjoyed much popularity in mainstream social policy scholarship. In addition, they are still poorly defined and remain controversial. Nevertheless, as was shown earlier in this chapter, they have attracted increasing attention in social policy circles in recent years and the literature on the subject has expanded.

Sixth, social development is *universalistic* in scope, being concerned with the population as a whole rather than with impoverished, vulnerable and needy groups of people. It also seeks to promote people's participation in development. However, it has historically directed resources towards those groups that derive little benefit from economic growth, such as the rural and inner-city poor, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, and landless labourers. It has also been extensively concerned with women and gender issues. In addition, some social development scholars and practitioners have focused attention on indigenous people who are often excluded and discriminated against and, in some cases, specialized programmes have been introduced to meet their needs. Nevertheless, social development's concern for these groups finds expression within the wider context of comprehensive policies that benefit the population as a whole and ensures their participation in development. This approach, which is known as 'positive discrimination' or 'targeting within universalism' (Skocpol, 1995), directs resources and services to needy groups within the framework of universal policies and programmes. However, this approach is not always effectively implemented, and some practitioners are exclusively concerned with poverty alleviation projects directed narrowly

DEFINING SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

at the poor. Nevertheless, universalism and participation are key social development principles.

Another aspect of social development's universalism is the requirement that social development practice directed at individuals and households be situated within community settings. This principle is particularly relevant to conventional welfare services that have relied on residential institutions to house those with special needs, such as people with disabilities, young offenders and elders. As Midgley (2010) argues, social workers engaged in developmental practice should only use residential services on a temporary basis and instead facilitate community living. They should also collaborate with non-governmental organisations to access local social networks, and in this way enhance client participation in the life of the community. Most progress has arguably been made with services for people with disabilities who were previously confined to residential institutions. Today, this is avoided and, in collaboration with disability advocacy and service groups, many people with disabilities in the Western countries now live in the community, have access to transportation and even secure remunerative employment (Midgley & Knapp, 2010). The principle of universalism also requires that the barriers that prevent social inclusion be addressed and that egalitarian and redistributive policies be adopted. It also reflects wider notions of social rights, social inclusion and stakeholding.

Finally, social development is committed to the goal of promoting people's social well-being. Although it was mentioned earlier that scholars and practitioners have over the years identified a large number of different social development goals, such as those enshrined in the *Millennium Declaration*, these discrete goals may be encapsulated within a broad commitment to improve the social well-being of the population as a whole. As will be discussed in more detail later in this book, the notion of social well-being requires that social needs be met, problems are managed and opportunities maximised for families, communities and societies. Social development advocates believe that a commitment to achieve social well-being for all can best be realised through a dynamic multi-faceted development process that utilises social investments and harnesses the power of economic growth for social ends.

Although no standardised definition of social development has yet been adopted, it is hoped that this book's definition is sufficiently broad to encompass and accommodate the diverse practice approaches as well as the different normative perspectives that characterise the field. Of course, this definition itself adopts a normative position that seeks to encompass different practice strategies, agents and normative perspectives within a broad pluralistic and pragmatic conception of what is possible and desirable. It relies on a critical, structuralist analysis of current social realities, recognising that the gains derived from economic growth are not equitably distributed. However, it is sceptical of the notion that there is one, simple solution to this problem. Although there is scope for utilising different agents and practice strategies as

well as diverse social institutions, social development is ultimately dependent on the contribution of proactive governments rooted in democratic traditions that act in the best interests of their citizens. These ideas will be discussed in more detail in the final chapter of this book where it will be argued that social development's integration of social policy with economic growth within a multifaceted development process and its use of social investments offer an effective approach for promoting people's well-being today.

Suggested additional readings

As discussed in this chapter, there is no standard, agreed upon definition of social development. However, the following publications deal with the nature and features of social development and some offer formal definitions which are worth considering.

- Aspalter, C. & Singh, S. (Eds) (2008). *Debating Social Development*. Taoyuan, Taiwan: Casa Verdi Publishing. This edited collection which is primarily concerned with social development in Asian countries, also discusses the definition and features of social development.
- Hall, A. & Midgley, J. (2004). *Social Policy for Development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. The book specifically links social development to the interdisciplinary subject of social policy and provides a broad overview of the different fields with which social development is linked. These include poverty and inequality, rural development, basic education, health services, social security, social work and human services.
- Jones, J. & Pandey, R. (Eds) (1981). *Social Development: Conceptual, Methodological and Policy Issues*. New York: St. Martin's Press. This edited collection was the first to define and describe social development as a distinctive academic and practice field. Although much of the book's contents are now out of date, the definitions by Pandey and Paiva and their discussion of social development's features remain relevant and useful.
- Midgley, J. (1995). *Social Development: The Developmental Perspective in Social Welfare*. London: Sage. Midgley's definition has been widely cited and provides a broad encompassing approach that links social welfare directly to economic development.
- Pawar, M. S. & Cox, D. (Eds) (2010). *Social Development: Critical Themes and Perspectives*. New York: Routledge. This book reviews key themes and issues in social development. It focuses largely on community-based activities such as participation, self-reliance and capacity-building.

DEFINING SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

However, it also discusses conceptual approaches to social development and considers ethical issues in the field.

- United Nations (2000). *The Millennium Declaration*. New York: UN. The Millennium Declaration adopted at a special session of the United Nations General Assembly has played an important role in social development over the last decade. It provides useful insights into the way governments and international bodies such as the UN define social development.