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Time use: the Missing Piece of Economic Development Studies

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Abstract

The concern of this paper is to highlight time use as a valuable resource and important factor in the development process of less developed countries. It propounds time use, that is neglected in developmental studies, as an important factor in human development index. The role of time management as a crucial element in providing and developing the effective human skills in LDCs will be studied. Learning organizations are recommended to direct social attitudes change toward time management. Traditional way of living and weak socio-economic infrastructures, which result in time-waste society, will be discussed as obstacles to change in LDCs.

Introduction

Hearing an ancient story was a motivation for me to study about the effect of time use in the quality of life, productivity and development. The story is about a stranger who enters a town. When he passes through the cemetery of the town, the abnormally short ages written on the tombs draw his attention. He asks local people about the cause for the deads' short lives. The answer is interesting. People in that town, were aged according to their quality of life or productivity, rather than the extent of time they were alive. So, "how old am I?", and "how effectively have I used my life and time?", can be a meaningful and thoughtful question to ask. An extension of those questions may be: "how old is a society, or a country"? Doesn't backwardness of LDCs signify their inability in taking advantage of the time and using it effectively? Can we age countries according to their productivity? We probably can, but it is complicated and requires quantitative indexes to be introduced and qualitative factors to be introduced. However, this is not the interest of this paper.

A country's progress usually reflects the degree of people's productivity. Aren't industrialized countries more developed because they use time, as well as other resources, more efficiently than LDCs?

Do LDCs have the same ability and knowledge to use time as do the modernized world? Isn't changes in time use and its social meaning important requirements and factors of modernization?

The concern of this paper is to show, and emphasize on, the importance of time as a valuable resource and important factor in the development process. Ignoring the value of time in LDCs can cause irredeemable damages, deepening the gap between rich and poor in future.

Time and Life

What is life? Well, people can have different definitions for life. One way to define life is the accumulation of moments. There are two ways to spend time, spend it wisely, or, well not so wisely. Some people get more done in less time; therefore have more time for the things they want to do which increases their life efficiency. Efficient time use makes people and the world work better, by affecting all aspects of life.

Time can be regarded as a valuable limited resource in human being's life. Time can be managed in different ways. Wasting time or taking advantage of the moments effectively usually determines the quality of a person's life. The way people spend their time depends on their values, norms and behavior. The history, culture, population, social, political and economic situation of a country determine the way people spend their time at work and leisure. The quality of the time spent is very important. A person may spend 8 hours at work with the productivity of just an hour, which is not unusual in many LDCs. Having bad feelings at work causes stress and does not let people enjoy their leisure time either which feed back again. People in high populated countries have to waste a lot of time on queues for shopping or getting different social services daily. The accumulated opportunity cost of time in these countries is an obstacle to development. Economic and social costs of wasted time hinder people from having a healthy and normal life.

Time use and Development

The gap between the rich and poor countries has increased in the last decades, in spite of the efforts of different international institutions, World Bank Group, UNDP, ... to rescue the life of people

in LDCs which contain nearly 80% of the world population. The 1997 HDI report took poverty as its theme, claiming that although progress in the twentieth century in reducing poverty has been unprecedented, advances have been uneven and marred by set backs, so that poverty remains pervasive [19]. Over a billion people still live in absolute poverty [32].

In the 1950s and 1960s the More Developed Countries decided that the main way of reducing world poverty is through economic growth. Different western oriented theories of economic development have been introduced to identify the barriers of development and to show the possible solutions in LDCs. In the main stream economic theories, the strong premise was that western economic history lessons could be transferred to the developing countries, as if efficient states and the protestant ethics were indeed universal facts. It became apparent by the mid-1970s that the premise of ideal civil society was inappropriate [16].

Economic development in post-independence countries proved to be more daunting and complex than the architects of modernization theory had ever imagined. Economic development could not be transplanted from outside as part of westernization which justified as "becoming modern" [16].

All nations do not have to follow the path of today's developed nations in order to achieve economic and social development [3]. The fact is that LDCs are faced with a combination of structural socio-economic and political shortcomings. Scientists in different human and social fields view LDCs problems according to their own perspective. Deficiency approaches to the development theories of LDCs can well be observed in the story that molavi, the great Iranian mystic, states to show the difficulty of having a comprehensive understanding about the facts. The story is about an elephant brought to a city from India for the first time. It was located in a dark place. A few people decided to realize what the animal looked like by touching it. They judged the animal's shape according to the part they touched. The one who had touched the ear assumed that it was like a fan. Another who had touched the elephant's trunk said it was similar to a drainpipe. The one who had touched the animal's foot said an elephant was similar to a pillar. The last one who had felt the animal's back said it looked like a flat board. The independent studies of historians,

political scientists, sociologists, management scholars, and economists do not give a comprehensive understanding of the situation in LDCs. The Economic theories of development usually ignore some hidden, social, political and historical constraints of development in LDCs.

All LDCs can not be regarded in the same way. The developing countries are not all poor countries, although the overwhelming majority of them certainly are; four or five classes of countries represent different stages of development [22]. Even those that are rich in resource but possess primitive and weak socio-economic infrastructures, have poor performance in economic development. Why? Luyamba and Djamba argue that LDCs failed to make transition from traditional to modern societies, in large part, due to the lack or misuse of time.

In spite of all differences that LDCs may have, they are common in poor human capital. Economists nowadays generally agree that investment in human capital is an essential requirement for development. Human resource – rich countries have demonstrated that they can develop even if they are poor in natural resources [18].

According to reed W.Larsn, a developmental psychologist, human capital is a function of time (T), where T is hours of education. Human capital development (HD) is also a function of T.

As UNDP has defined, development is the process of expansion of choices in life through improved capabilities (UNDP 1999). Countries need to develop better measures of welfare and well being particularly in the context of time [8]. Dimensions of time use convey important information on the quality of life that existing measurements of living standards do not.

Luyamba and Djamba suggest a positive relationship between time use and economic development. According to them, effective use of time is a prerequisite for socio- economic development. Transformation of a society from atraditional stage to the stage of development can not be achieved unless the members of that society understand and effectively use time to accomplish complex tasks associated with modernization. Many LDCs have not achieved socio-economic development because they have not successfully learned the utility of time use in modernization process.

Without changing a society from time-waste society to one characterized by time managing and task-prioritizing society, people can not acquire "empowerment" for human development in LDCs.

Time use and knowledge

As Marshall declared, "Although nature is subject to decreasing returns man is subject to increasing returns. Knowledge is our most powerful engine of production. It enables us to subdue nature and satisfy our wants". The knowledge embedded in human being is the basis for achieving an increase in total factor productivity, so the quality of people as productive agents must be a central objective of development policies [18]. It is crucial to find out how the abilities and skills of people are to be improved. To improve human infrastructure, motivation and values of people should be modified in order to make them suitable for development efforts.

One way of improving the abilities and skills of people is to help them understand time, its value and effective use. Time management should be institutionalized through learning organizations. In other words "empowerment", the most important and meaningful world in the vast amount of Jargon invented by development economists [19], can be obtained by increasing the ability of people to use time more efficiently.

Change in time use and its social meaning is an important factor of modern life. The world is transitioning from an economy- based manufacturing and natural resources to one that is more on information and knowledge. Knowledge has been increasing in many fields with dramatic break through in technology which has revolutionalized the way things are done. In many LDCs most activities are done in the same way for generations. If you always do what you've always done, you always get what you've always got. To change our output, we must change our input [30]. To change our life, we need to change our time use.

Poor developing countries have rightly stressed the importance of primary education, for primary education is the base of the entire system. But a significant closing of the knowledge gap requires more than a strong primary education system [25]. The speed and the amount of knowledge is increasing very rapidly. Half of what is known today, we did not know 10 years ago. The amount of

knowledge in the world has doubled in the last 10 years and it is said to be doubling again every 18 months [30]. LDCs should become active in web-based distance learning to prevent the widening gap with more developed countries. LDCs are likely to fall further behind the developed world in terms of economic growth and prosperity, without some feasible system for educating time use.

Recent advances in telecommunication have brought the costs of communication down tremendously and have made possible the development of communications networks in almost all parts of the world. These new technologies mean that there is no longer a natural monopoly. The internet is proving to be tool of immense power in sharing knowledge [25]. For the internet to be publicized, the culture of using internet should be provided. People need to be socially concerned about the value of time and time management to be able to get the coping skill and conceptual understanding of the global environment.

Today LDCs face both risks and great opportunities. Internet growth has been most rapid in the US, and not surprisingly, slowest in the LDCs. The enhanced ability to share and acquire knowledge in the advanced industrialized countries may increase the knowledge gap as the LDCs may become even more disadvantaged. Creating the knowledge infrastructure entails "learning how to Learn", that is, creating the capacity to close the knowledge gap, an essential part of a successful development strategy [25].

Time is the key of success in our modern life. Organizations, people and countries compete on attaining knowledge faster. The one who receives and uses knowledge sooner is the winner of the game. So, the moments are important. Under this condition, what would happen to a time-waste society?

Knowledge that is also introduced by the UNDP as one of the basic components of Human Development, can not efficiently spread in LDCs unless people become aware of the value of time and its effect on productivity and development.

Time use and learning

We all come into and leave this world the same way, broke and naked. We all have 24 hours day. We all have limited hours to live. We knew how to do nothing when we arrived but then we learned

[31]. The more we learned, the efficient time we used, and the more we applied what we knew, the grater our success and thereby, our society's success has been. Learning process never ends for any of us as we strive to improve our life situation.

Traditionally, people learned general skills (general human capital) at school and learned specific skills (specific capital) at work. The new economy has created challenges and opportunities in the field of learning. The level of performance and improvement needed today requires learning lots of learning [9]. The faster pace of technological change and the tremendous increase in communications capability prove that primary education system does not satisfy the requirements in the age of internet. The key to success in any activity is to develop effective skills [15]. Effective skills can be acquired through the context of time management. If the lack of effective skills is at least one of the main reasons for misallocation of resources and low productivity in LDCs, then what should be done to improve human skills? This can basically be done us well as other efforts through learning how to use time efficiently. Time management need to be introduced as a vital element of acquiring human skills. Learning organizations help people at all levels, individually and collectively, continually increase their capacity to produce results they really care about [9].

Managing Time Use Change

People of LDCs with outdated skills need to change the way they spend time by learning how to change. LDCs need to undergo revolutionary changes in response to global changes [13]. What people resist is the social change brought about by technological change. Plato believed that "change takes place no matter what deters it". Ability to manage change determines success [24]. Traditional way of living and weak socio-economic infrastructures which result in time waste are obstacles to change in LDCs. United Nation Development program can help LDCs, to increase their ability to manage social change through learning organizations. Obstacles to social change in LDCs need to be identified, through comprehensive and collaborative study of related disciplines, by psychologists, sociologists,, and experts in development studies. The suggestions and solutions to overcome resistance should also be discussed and

change models are to be introduced through systems process. The scientific achievements can be disseminated through a United Nation Learning international Network (UNLIN). Learning organizations, equipped with few computers and supported by the UNDP, can be established not only in the urban areas but also in the rural areas of many LDCs to receive distance- learning services from UNLIN. The concern here is to get people to change what they do. People of the LDCs, specially the youth, need to change the way they spend time. The awareness that efficient time use means more productivity and better life can be a motivation for regarding time as a valuable resource in LDCs.

Learning organizations can help social attitudes change toward time management. Time management refers to techniques that enable people to get more done in less time with better results. Time management tools and techniques should be introduced through learning organizations for better life [13]. Time management can help increase productivity. What is important now is working smarter, not harder, and getting more done in less time [29].

Developing time management skills is an effective way to reduce stress, increase personal productivity, and experience inner peace [13]. One can possibly gain control of one's life by controlling one's time [23]. Effective time use make the world work, affecting community, business, government and the human future.

Time use can be applied as a means of analyzing various social phenomena and provides comprehensive information on life styles of families and patterns of social life as revealed by the allocation of time among several different human activities [29].

Time use surveys can contribute to the understanding of the economy and society in several ways. Time use studies has emerged as important statistical survey for measuring and monitoring human wellbeing and policy formulation in different areas [29].

Time Delay in LDCs

When time delay is institutionalized in a society, it will usually be observed both at the micro and macro levels. Under this situation even punctuated people have no other choice but tolerate the opportunity cost of time imposed by the others. Time delay in LDCs is remarkable in different areas, e.g. air flights, private and public

meetings, business and official appointments, presentation of the budget bill to the parliament, and so on. The high opportunity cost of time lost in LDCs is one of the main reasons for their low productivity. If time delay as a social behavior of people in LDCs is transferred to the next generation, while time-based competition is regarded as a key to success in MDCs, more gap between the rich and poor should be expected in future. In that case, neither LDCs nor MDCs can enjoy a convenient life so that while the 'have-nots' live on in the streets, the 'haves' imprison themselves behind grids and electric fences.

Conclusion

Time waste is one of the hidden roots of undevelopment in LDCs. Human capital development is a function of time [12]. The way people spend their time affect all aspects of their lives. The quality of people as productive agents must be a central objective of development policies. People create, manage, and use technology; therefore people are considered the most important resource.

Time is the most precious resource at our command. Time use in LDCs needs special attention and is recommended to be an indicator for measuring HDI. Efficient time use is an important prerequisite for acquiring and improving human infrastructure. To view time as a valuable resource, the social attitudes and behavior of people in LDCs need to change. Social change is a long term processing phenomenon which requires not only developmental research but also interdisciplinary concerns with disciplines like sociology and management sciences. Resistance to change, which is part of human nature, in LDCs needs to be investigated and the obstacles to change should be identified to implement the change process successfully. Learning Institutions supported by UNDP can launch the social change program through e-distance learning.

Developing countries are likely to fall further behind the developed world in terms of economic growth and prosperity, without some feasible system for changing their social attitudes and behavior toward efficient time use through learning institutions. Efficient time use, as well as other tools for "empowerment", is an essential part of a successful development strategy.

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