Recommendations:

A capacities approach which emphasizes real-world opportunities for all to flourish can move international development toward its goals, including gender equity, more effectively than continuing to pursue economic growth.

1. Begin by deemphasizing growth in policy objectives (a full-out rejection will likely create unnecessary resistance).

2. Reject the synonymous use of “development” and “growth” by speaking instead of human flourishing.

3. Spend more effort understanding how to operationalize and measure the maximization of capacities. Start by
   a. Engaging social groups to develop their own lists of essential capacities that fit their cultures and values
   b. Assessing existing capacities under a variety of frameworks of “essential” capacities
   c. These two exercises should reveal which perspectives have been missing; next, build the capacity for all to equitably contribute to objective-setting.

...the income of the poorest 10% of the population has continued to decline or to...
increase less than that of the richest 10%. Relative income poverty – the share of people with less than half of median income of their country in each year – was broadly unchanged between 2007 and 2011. But “anchored poverty” – with the value of the threshold fixed in real terms at the 2005 level – increased by 2 percentage points in the OECD area during this period, and by much more in countries such as Greece and Spain.”

Women bear this burden more than men and at a macro level, women face systemic barriers to overcoming income inequality. In every country, women earn less pay for the same work (Cha & Weeden, 2014). Growth-led income inequality exacerbates this situation, with growth justifying, rather than alleviating, systemic biases that have no basis in personal merit (Narayan et al., 2013).

Women also bear the burden of income inequality at the micro level; in many households, income inequality experienced by the unit is likely to lead to decisions about who gets to go to school and who does not, where girls are often kept at home (Zhang & Kanbur, 2005) and resource constraints are more likely to lead women and girls to consume less nutrition (Global Nutrition Report, 2014) and do more unpaid labor (Block, 2013).

Example 2: Gendered inequities related to economic growth are also found in richer countries. In Canada, for example, women’s preferences for business include slower growth and lower business size caps (Cliff, 1998), meaning that a continued focus on large, rapid growth does not serve women’s interests. Further, Canadian-focused research on gendered preferences in business practices (Orser & Hogarth-Scott, 2009) suggests that the hastier and more expansive growth leads to riskier businesses which fail more often. Women are unequally treated in two ways:

1. Women’s values are not recognized as equally legitimate
2. Women’s contributions to a stable economy are not being compensated by policies which offer financial or other incentives for fast, big growth.

Example 3: A commitment to growth is a commitment to resource constraints which are not necessary; there are currently enough food and other resources to sustain the existing and growing population (FAO, 2012), but growth commits us to using ever-more resources, ensuring a future in which there are not adequate resources for all. When resources are constrained by any kind of growth – economic, family, city – gendered values are at play, such as conflict/machismo being preferred over collaboration or community-building (Zhang & Maruping, 2008; Lloyd et al., 2014). This creates “winners and losers;” since there is not enough for all, the losers are often women due to a systemic lack of competitiveness (less access to the resources to compete equally – education, food, political clout) but also because feminine ethics such as community support, access for all, and sharing are devalued in this competitive climate. While these attitudes are not necessarily always borne by women as collectivists or men as more adversarial in solving problems, trends do persist along a female/male divide (Nutch, 1996; Taddei & Gamboggi, 2009). The prevalence of masculine values drives growth (Petrakis, 2014); growth devalues feminine ethics while perpetuating gendered responsibilities in a gendered economy (Lloyd et al., 2014; Petrakis, 2014).
Policy Options

1. **Status Quo – Grow, Baby, Grow!**

Today, the accepted approach to international development is to emphasize *development by focusing on economic growth.*

**Advantages:**
- Already in place; easy
- Do not have to challenge strong political powers
- Offers an attractive (but illogical) promise that the economic “pie” can simply be *made bigger* through growth so that everyone has enough, even if some have *much more* than others
  - No one has to give anything up
  - Dodges moral challenges and the discomfort of admitting to disparities in quality of life
- Confirms, rather than challenges, masculine social values of competition
- Avoids the implication (from other two approaches) that our current global economy is flawed and needs restructuring

**Disadvantages:**
- Requires that we ignore suffering inherent resulting from market economics
- Requires ignoring the logic of finite resources
- Requires ignoring evidence of failure to meet development goals thus far
- Does not address gender equity concerns

2. **Redistribute Wealth and Resources**

Some opponents to growth recommend that we redistribute wealth and other resources to achieve equity (Midgley, 1999).

**Advantages:**
- Workable – evidence shows there is enough to go around (Firebaugh, 2000)
- Equitable – will satisfy our hedonistic yearnings to “help others”

**Disadvantages:**
- May perpetuate dependency (and thereby inequality)
- Women, as a needy group, are situated as victims. Redistribution may meet immediate needs but fails to address larger concerns of equalizing power dynamics and acknowledging and valuing a diversity of perspectives, contributions, needs.
- Politically unpalatable as stifling growth and thus likely to face fierce resistance from the most economically wealthy
- Faces opposition as unethically rewarding poor work ethic
- “One size fits all” is likely to lead to political struggles that may include violence

3. **Build Capacities**

Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum (Nussbaum, 2000) have reimagined the meaning of “development” to mean something other than economic growth; instead, they argue for measuring human well-being based on the realistic opportunities that all people in a group have to pursue the “good life” as it is defined by the group of which a person is a part.

**Advantages:**
- Allows for multiplicity of “good” societies
- Doesn’t directly challenge status quo of market economics (one possible definition of a “good life”); more politically palatable
- Ensures, within a given social group, that all members women are treated equally

**Disadvantages:**
- Entails an overhaul of the way we understand “good society” – this may include a devaluation of what is currently valued by the powerful
- May be easy to coopt “capabilities approach” into status quo economic growth due to complexity and ambiguity of concept
- Difficult to operationalize and measure
- Scale is challenging – smaller is easier
- Consensus and inclusive decision-making are difficult, but required components at least to define “good society” and identify next steps

Recommendation for Development Policy

Continuing to measure human development by standards of economic growth is the easy way forward, as it is already in place. A swing to the other side would be to shift (back) to a redistribution model, but the gains in equity are likely to be negated by a difficult political climate and continued victimization rather than liberation of people born into unlucky circumstances. Shifting to a capacities approach offers a novel path that allows a variety of values, including economic growth and redistribution, to be acceptable paradigms as long as all members of the group have the same real opportunities to influence the goal and the measurement of progress and to be active at any level in the process. It is necessary to abandon growth as the objective and to begin measuring human development by these real opportunities. From the examples above, a capacities approach would

1. Remove the growth imperative that currently is one cause of income disparity between men and women;
2. Require that a society’s participants, like Canadian women, have equal voice in shaping the nature of business and business promotion. This would create more equity within richer countries and in poorer ones, as they are influenced by richer countries’ development policy-making roles; and
3. Allow for resource consumption patterns that do not require growth, thereby enabling fair distribution based on the self-defined needs and values of the group’s members.

Conclusion

Economic growth has been seen to be an ineffective strategy for reaching the goals of human development at a global level. Policy makers can make better use of efforts and resources by abandoning growth in favor of maximizing real-world opportunities for human flourishing for all; a capacities approach offers an alternative roadmap for what to do next.
References


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