

## TRANSFORMATION: THE BUREAUCRATIC APPROACH

### STUDY 5: PROBLEMS AND POTENTIAL IN TOP-DOWN DEVELOPMENT

#### Top-down or Bottom-up

One of the liveliest and longest debates in development is about the relative merits of the "top-down" and "bottom-up" approaches. In the Old Testament period the top-down approach is best expressed by the kings of Israel and Judah. Today's equivalent would be governments and multinational agencies. This approach seeks to gather resources and deliver services to the poor. In practice, however, most of the benefits are monopolized by the rich and often only a small proportion of the money intended for the poor actually reaches them. The bottom-up approach seeks to conscientize and mobilize the poor to develop themselves. This may involve challenging the unjust structures of society in order to claim a greater proportion of the available resources for themselves.

Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden write:

The king of Israel was not only to be an ideal citizen, he had the special role of exercising God's help on the side of the poor. J. Dupont writes: 'The main function of the king of Israel was to ensure justice for his subjects. His subjects included the powerful and the weak, the rich and the poor. The powerful and the rich would always manage to abuse their power to oppress and exploit the weak and poor, who, unable to defend themselves, would gradually founder in misery. It was the king's duty to restore the balance. He was the defender of those who could not defend themselves: he would guarantee the rights of the weak in the face of the powerful, as well as repress the rich who threatened the rights of the poor.'

So the Book of Proverbs describes the task of the king in the words of King Lemuel's mother: 'Speak up for the people who cannot speak for themselves. Protect the rights of all who are helpless. Speak for them and be a righteous judge. Protect the rights of the poor and needy.'

But the kings of Israel rarely matched up to this picture. Ahab's seizure of Naboth's vineyard is but one example of the greed of the leaders that Ezekiel castigated in chapter 34. They took care of themselves and not of the sheep, they failed to take care of the weak, sick, the hurt, and the lost. They ate the best grass and trampled what they could not eat. They muddied the waters they did not drink. So God raised up prophets, not to promulgate a new law, but to recover and make relevant the law's emphasis on justice, which the kings had forgotten.

(Unpublished paper, "Social Justice: Biblical Themes and Practical Expression".)

Read Ezekiel 34 and list the faults of the leaders of Israel.

#### Expectations vs. Experience

When the tribes of Israel asked for a king they obviously did not expect to be exploited by their own leaders. In fact they wanted a king so they could be united and strong like the nations around them. They may also have wanted to legitimize their conformity to the religious and social practices of their neighbors rather than continue to try to live up to the high standards of a just and holy God. The specific event which made them appeal for a king was that Eli's sons "turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice" (1 Sam. 8:3)

God and Samuel predicted that the kings would be no better. List the problems likely to arise when too much power is concentrated in one person's hands, according to a) Deut. 17:14-20 and b) 1 Sam. 8:10-18.

How many of these predictions were fulfilled by Solomon, Israel's third king?

How many seem to be true of your country today?

Of course there were good rich men, priests, and kings. What were the characteristics of a) Job (see Job 29:12-17)? b) of Eli (1 Sam 12:3)? of c) David (2 Sam. 23:3-4)

Research: Read through 2 Kings and count how many kings of Israel and Judah did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and how many did evil.

### Biblical Patterns of National Leadership

Kings were not the only type of national leadership described in the Old Testament. Others included:

1) The Clan Patriarch System. Later Hebrew historians and prophets referred back to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as the "founders of the nation", and indeed they were. Yet at the time that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived the Hebrews were barely a clan. They were really only a family group. Abraham had only two sons, one of whom he sent away. Isaac also had just two sons – Jacob and Esau who went in different directions. Jacob alone had a large family with 12 sons. However, while their immediate families may have been small, they were all wealthy nomadic farmers with many flocks and shepherds and for these people the family head took responsibility. They were something like a village headman in rural India or a tribal chief in Africa.

2) The Divinely Appointed Leader. Details of the next 400 years are lost in history. It is apparent that Jacob and his clan settled in Goshen, Egypt and also that they became slaves to the Egyptians. When and how they lost their rights and autonomy is not described. Moses' life story is the record of God intervening to rescue the Hebrews from slavery through the mediation of His representative who was prepared for stage one of the process by living as an Egyptian prince for 40 years and equipped for stage two by being a shepherd in Midian for 40 years. While Moses' leadership was challenged by the people and his family (ex. 4:20ff, Num. 15:1ff) he was the ultimate authority under God. He shared the leadership in two ways. Aaron, his brother, became the leader of religious ritual and the founder of the permanent priesthood. Leaders of thousands, of hundreds, or fifties, and of tens were appointed to help in decision making and dispute settling (Ex. 17).

Joshua continued the pattern of a non-hereditary leader appointed by God. After a lapse of approximately 200 years Samuel also fulfilled this role combining administrative and prophetic leadership.

3) The Local Judges. For the first two centuries of settlement in the Promised Land each community was led by local leaders. Except to combat attacks from neighboring peoples there was no strong centralized leadership nor any particular urban center recognized as an administrative or political capital.

One of the local judges usually had national responsibilities. The election system varied. Some judges sought this leadership; others, such as Gideon, refused it. When any tribe of Israel was attacked, messages soon brought men of the other tribes to their aid. After the battle, all returned to their respective homes, families, and occupations. One of the most successful judges was a woman, Deborah. She strengthened village life and brought peace to the land for 40 years.

Towards the end of the period of judges the nation's unity, so strong when they established themselves in the land, had weakened to the point where there was very little cooperation. Many had adopted local Canaanite customs and religious beliefs, and "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Jdg. 21:25)

4) The Messiah. The Old Testament vision of the Messiah was of an ideal king who would reign in justice and peace. He would sit on the throne of David and rule from Jerusalem. The nation would prosper and become famous so that all the nations of the earth would come to Jerusalem to worship. While power and authority would be concentrated in the hands of one person, this would benefit all the people. Jesus contradicted these expectations by:

1. Not living in a palace.
2. Staying in rural Galilee and only visiting Jerusalem on a few occasions.
3. Being a poor commoner rather than a rich king.
4. Dealing with personal rather than national issues.

#### Power Relationships in the Kingship Period.

There were four main groups influencing decision-making in Israel and Judah.

1. The king and his nobles.
2. The priests.
3. The prophets.
4. The people.

Each group had different interests and methods of exerting influence and while the kings were officially the controlling group at times the real authority lay with the priests, prophets, or people (Figure 5.1).

State the percentage of the population which you think belonged to each group in Figure 5.1. Were the groups always separate? If not, what alliances were formed and why? Redraw the boxes to represent the size of each group. What are the modern equivalents of these power groups?

Another illustration of the injustice of the top-down approach is an analysis of how the aid dollar is spent. A recent calculation for a Christian aid agency estimated that for every dollar given, approximately 15 percent reached the intended beneficiaries. The breakdown is pictured in Figure 5.2. Other estimates calculate that 40% reaches the beneficiaries. Very seldom would more than 60% be distributed to the intended recipients. Discuss this example.

## How Can the People Participate?

In an agricultural society with only simple technology, most of this time is spent surviving. Water and food must be collected prepared, and cooked. Fields must be ploughed with animals and simple ploughs, or dug by hand. Cows, sheep, and goats need constant tending. There is little time left for leisure, politics, or religion.

However, primitive agriculture, except in very fertile areas with irrigation or regular rainfall is a very seasonal activity. Except at planting and harvest time, there is not much work and marginal farmers or landless farm laborers seek alternative off-season employment. At such times they migrate to the city, set up temporary shelters and look for work. As in the rural area the whole day is likely to be spent in earning enough to live. For the poor, life is a struggle. If they have little education or few marketable skills they are usually eliminated from any decision making. Their lives are controlled by others.

The theological questions raised by this profile are, "How can the image of God be reflected by people who have been reduced to pawns?" And, "How can the poor/common people be involved in shaping their own lives and destinies?"

Attempts to include the poor in decision making have included:

- a) Giving voting rights to all adults in the society to elect local and national leaders.
- b) Creation of village councils and dispersal of power to local groups.
- c) Reservation of positions for the poor on decision making bodies
- d) Insistence that membership on public sector committees represent the proportions in the population.
- e) Election of local people only, for public office.

Assess the extent to which these and other measures to involve the people in decision making are practiced in your community.

## The Flow of Resources

There are three main channels by which aid flows from rich to poorer nations: a) government to government assistance, b) voluntary agency involvement, and c) commercial investment. Each has advantages and disadvantages. From the characteristics stated below, state which type of aid they most apply to:

- a) Countrywide schemes.
- b) Rapid transfer of funds.
- c) Support of industry.
- d) Cost effectiveness.
- e) Accountability.
- f) Benefits to the elite.
- g). Help fro the poor.
- h) Emergency assistance.
- i) Holistic approach.
- j) Decisions in sending countries.
- k) Decisions by local beneficiaries.

Give one example and share the reason for your choice with others.

On a macro level many writers suggest that very little aid really reaches the poor and that instead, most benefit returns to the donors.

Consider the following statement by George Dunne.

The classicists, while admitting that the first fruits of economic growth are reaped by the present holder of economic power, contend that ultimately the benefit will seep down to the impoverished masses. This is the line of reasoning of the present managers of Brazil's economic 'boom'. The difficulty with this line of reasoning is that the 'ultimately' can be awfully long in coming. It may be a much longer time than the impoverished two-thirds of humanity are willing, or should be expected, to wait. There are substantial sectors of society – 'pockets of poverty' they are called – in the affluence world still waiting for the seepage to reach them. In the underdeveloped world the situation is reversed. Here small islets of often outrageous wealth are surrounded by a vast sea of poverty

Waldron Scott in Bring Forth Justice uses a diagram to illustrate the failure of aid (Figure 5.3). There are many specific examples of gross misuse of aid funds. In Bangladesh in 1986 an aid program sponsored by a European country was canceled because 82 percent of the expenses went into supporting expatriate personnel! Later the same year (on 27 October) BBC reported that western governments were expressing concern about a net outflow of capital from developing countries.

The failure of aid and development has led to some pessimistic views. Arthur Simon reports two in his book Bread for the World.

One idea made popular by scientist Gerrett Hardin pictures the rich countries as lifeboats filled to near capacity. If more people are pulled in, the lifeboats will sink and everyone will drown. SO those in the lifeboats have to push away others who are trying to climb in. By this view, to feed the hungry and bring them medical care is to overload the lifeboats and, therefore, precisely the wrong thing to do.

The other argument, suggested by William and Paul Paddock in their book Famine 1975! uses a military idea called 'triage'. The world is like a battle field covered with wounded soldiers but not enough medics. What to do? 1) Some will die no matter what help they get. Abandon them. 2) Others can survive without treatment. Ignore them also. 3) Help only those who, though wounded seriously, can be saved with immediate care. Applied to the hunger-population dilemma, a triage means deciding which countries are beyond assistance and letting their people starve (1984, p. 40)

Prepare and conduct a debate on one of these views.

### The Beneficiaries

Having struggled to maximize the percentage of aid and development money reaching the poor it must yet be asked, "Which poor?" Experience in a Christian relief and development agency in India indicates tendencies for:

- a) Relatives of staff becoming primary beneficiaries.
- b) Recipients of overseas funding to be paternalistic in the distribution of it.
- c) Money to encourage corruption.

A further question to consider in this study is: are the poor participants in the planning and design of the development activities intended to benefit them or merely recipients? If they are only consumers and not stewards of resources they are not fulfilling God's creation mandate. Many people involved in development programs would endorse Rev. Vinay Samuel's challenge, "We are to be stewards first and then consumers; the problem with many development agencies is that we have made people consumers." Discuss this statement.

After years of involvement in development programs two consultants concluded that their best contribution was not to critique various aid agencies but to share the questions they asked of all aid projects. They wrote "Seven Questions to ask an Aid Project."

1. Whose project is it? Is it the donor's agency's OR does it originate with the people involved?
2. Does the project diagnose the problem to be tackled as a technical or physical deficiency (i.e. poor farming methods or depleted soil) that can be overcome with the right technique and skills? OR is the physical or technical problem seen as only a reflection of social and political relationships that need to be altered?
3. Does it reinforce the economic and political power of a certain group which then becomes more resistant to change that might abolish its privileges? OR does it generate a shift in power to the powerless?
4. Does it mean the intervention of outside experts, taking away local initiative? OR does it generate a process of democratic decision making and a thrust toward self-reliance that can carry over to future projects?
5. Does it reinforce dependence on outside sources of material and skills? OR does it use local ingenuity, local labor, and local materials, and can it be maintained with local skills?
6. Does it merely help individuals adjust to their exploitation by such external forces as the national government or the international market? OR does it encourage an understanding of that exploitation and a resistance to it?
7. Will success only be measured by the achievement of the pre-set plans of outsiders? OR is the project open-ended, with success measured by the local people as the project progresses?

Use these questions to evaluate an aid project. Score the answers.

## Conclusion

The final pessimistic verdict on most of the kings of Israel and Judah is also often passed on well meaning development programs. An Indian poet, Cecil Rajendra in "Song for the Unsung" laments the death of a village.

Here  
intimations of death  
hang  
heavy in the air.  
Everywhere  
there is the stench of decay and despair.

The river  
strangled by  
exigencies of  
industrialization  
is dying...  
and nobody cares.

The fish  
in the river  
poisoned by  
progress's vomit  
are dying...  
and nobody cares.  
The birds  
that feed on the fish  
in the river  
poisoned by  
progress's excrement  
are dying...  
and nobody cares

And so  
a once-proud village  
sustained  
for centuries by the richness  
of this river  
dies...  
and nobody cares.

To that mammon  
DEVELOPMENT  
our high-priests  
sacrifice our customs  
our culture  
our traditions  
and environment

and nobody cares.

We blind mice,  
we blind mice,  
see what we've done,  
see what we've done,  
We all ran after  
Progress's wife  
she cut off our heads  
with Development's knife  
have you ever seen such fools in your life  
as we blind mice?

Now add your own example of a successful or unsuccessful aid or development program.



Figure 5.1 (page 180)