

TRANSCRIPT

Sustainable Development: Why Develop Sustainably In The First Place?

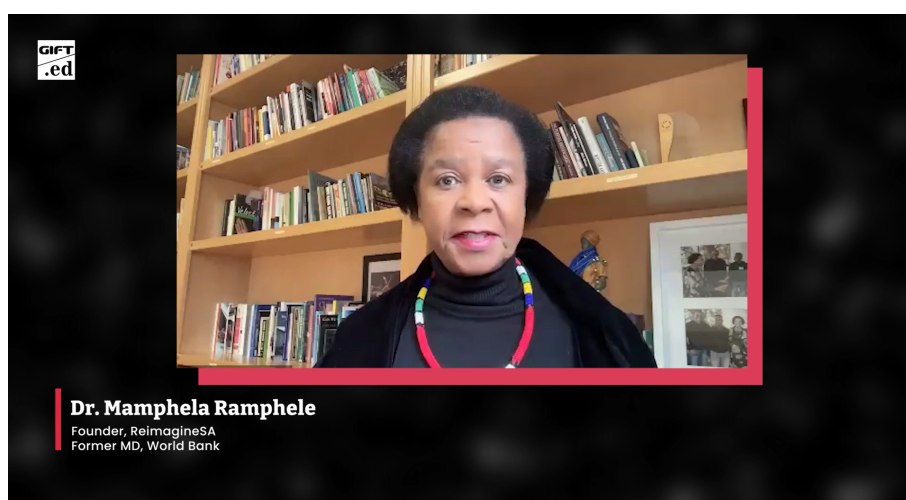
Rohan Hazell:

"National development" is a phrase we often hear. But what does it actually mean? It's usually used in the context of economic growth. But in truth, this is just one aspect of national development. In fact, most definitions of development centre around improvements in standard of living for citizens. And while a strong and vibrant economy is critical to achieve this aim, it is not the only consideration.

This raises the question: If improved wellbeing is the ultimate outcome of development, and not just economic growth, then to what degree should environmental and social concerns factor into developmental efforts? This is one of the key issues to consider when discussing sustainable development in today's world.

To answer this question, you'll hear from Dr. Mamphela Ramphele, South African politician, anti-apartheid activist, medical doctor and businesswoman. Dr. Ramphele is also a former Managing Director of the World Bank and she draws on all her years of experience on the front lines and in the boardroom to share her views on how sustainable development can take place. As a pioneer and advocate for socioeconomic progress in her own country and around the world, Dr. Ramphele explains how national development can be achieved without compromising the wellbeing of society or the environment.

Dr. Mamphela Ramphele:



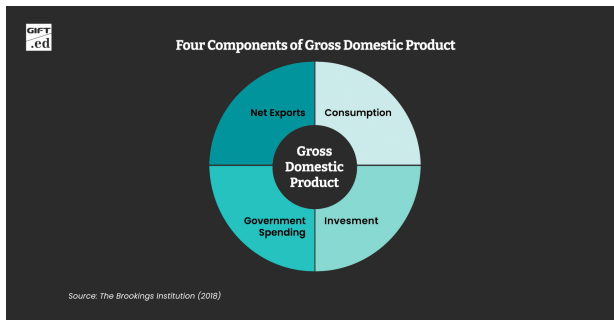
The first point should be about asking the question: What do we want to accomplish? What is the transformation in aid of? If the transformation is to enhance the wellbeing of all people and to promote a healthy ecosystem, then the approach and the choices we make will be different. The traditional transformational approach is normally driven by a development paradigm that puts a very big emphasis on economics and the growth of the economy, which is all about having. What do you have as a nation? What do you have as an individual? Whereas if the focus is on wellbeing and a healthy ecosystem, the focus is going to be on being. And this is the beautiful thing about we are called human beings. We are inherently a relational species. No single human being can thrive alone in the desert or in the forest. We are wired to be with others, to be supported by others. We are at our best when we are relating to people who give us love, support, and that is mutual.

And so my major point about how do we approach transformation is to say, let us put aside this starting place of trade-offs. And the trade-offs are a product of a development paradigm that says you've got to grow the economy and if a few people get left out, it's part of what they call collateral damage. If the ecosystem gets polluted, it's part of the culture. No. I am criticising the approach to development that is linear, and at the heart of that is the idea that to be developed, quote unquote, is to have a higher GDP, to have billionaires and millionaires. That's a value system of having.

If we shift to the value system of being, a society that is highly developed is a society where no child goes to bed hungry, no old person is sitting lonely at home. Everybody is catered for with a safe, reliable public transport and other public services. And where every citizen feel that they belong and they contribute. And so it is time for us now to jettison the idea of GDP as a measure of development to the idea of wellbeing for a healthy planet as the measure of development. In that measure, no one is developed as we speak. And no one should be called underdeveloped. Because coming from a country like mine, which is not a poor country, but a country that has missed the opportunity to leverage its huge resources to make sure that every citizen is well and is feeling good about themselves and contributing to the wellbeing and the health of our ecosystem.

I think the root cause of the problem has been the colonising of the world by Europe and America in particular. And this colonisation was motivated by the need to extract resources, mineral, natural, human, in terms of slavery. And the damage of that legacy is not taken into consideration when people talk about developed and developing countries. So called developed countries have taken away from those they call underdeveloped. The resources they need not to be developed, but to create wellbeing societies and healthy ecosystems.

And so putting away this label of developed, developed calls for conversations about how do we have mutual, supportive conversations about the need for global just transitions away from GDP-driven growth models to wellbeing and healthy ecosystem models.



And so what I'm calling for is a reimagination of our understanding of development, which has to be human development, with people at the centre. And every person matters. There isn't a person who is collateral damage. We have to stop this practice of externalising costs to the environment and to people we regard as expendable and internalising all the benefits. And when we approach, whatever we do with that mindset, we will not continue the carnage that we are visiting upon nature and upon our fellow human beings. And in contrast, we will see just how abundant the resources become when we share. As they say, sharing is caring.

Rohan Hazell:

As Dr. Ramphele puts it, if we are to achieve sustainable development, we must begin by clarifying the purpose of our efforts. This purpose can be solely aimed at economic growth. But for the most part, the deeper aim of development is ultimately to raise standards of living and improve the overall wellbeing of society. By reframing the definition of development this way, we can start to look beyond the narrative that it must always be a trade-off or zero sum game, where for one party to gain, another must lose.

In this way, we can start to view sustainable development as a collective effort that benefits not only the wellbeing of societies, but also the natural ecosystems that support them.