

Theoretical Origins and Implications of the Western Linear Development Models in Contemporary International Relations and Development Economics

Zhaorui Zhang

University of California at Berkeley, Berkeley, US

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Abstract: Beginning with Lenin's criticism of imperialism and working through the modernization theory presented by academics such as Walt Rostow, this study attempts to investigate these development theories' theoretical roots and consequences. This paper examines the theoretical origin and contemporary implications of Imperialism, neocolonialism, neoliberalism, and trade liberalization, focusing on applying linear development models in international relations and development economics. Using critical theoretical frameworks, including Lenin's theory on imperialism, dependency theory, and modernization theory, analyzed the transformation of economic control from colonialism to the neocolonial practice perpetuated by transnational corporations and international monetary institutions. Cases including the reconstruction of the Haitian earthquake in 2010, President Truman's inaugural address, and Chile's neoliberal economic reforms under Pinochet provide an empirical examination of how trade liberalization and neoliberal policy strengthen the economic reliance of developing countries and increase their internal inequality. By challenging the traditional Western linear development model, this paper criticized how the global economic system perpetuates a hierarchical relationship between the Global South and North.

1. Introduction

For centuries, the paths of world growth and international relations have been formed by the stories of trade liberalization, neocolonialism, and imperialism. Even if direct colonial authority gave way to more indirect kinds of control, solid nations' economic and political domination over smaller, emerging ones is still quite clear today. Modern international relations mainly use linear development models, sometimes framed in terms of free trade, globalization, and economic progress, nevertheless reflect this hierarchical structure. Rooted in Western ideas, these models can ignore the complexity of local histories, economics, and cultures to show progress as a one-dimensional road that all countries must travel. Moreover, this study explores how the neoliberal policies supported by international financial institutions have increased national economic reliance in nations such as Haiti and Chile. Using a mix of theoretical analysis and case studies, this paper challenges the very nature of progress and development in a globalized society and the function of Western hegemonic structures

and global capitalism in sustaining the same inequalities they claim to be eradicable.

2. Theoretical Origins

From ideas challenging political and economic dominance, imperialism, neocolonialism, and trade liberalization develop into frameworks justifying current global power dynamics and economic control.

2.1 Imperialism and Neocolonialization

In Lenin's book "Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism," we can find a relatively earlier interpretation of Imperialism, which, to a great extent, builds a foundational framework for further analyzing neocolonialism and trade liberalization in a contemporary context. In the book, Lenin points out that the economic motivation that's behind imperialism and colonialization is that when capitalist society reaches a point where they need new markets, raw materials, and cheap labor forces, colonization and economic subjugation of less developed countries becomes the solution [1].

Neocolonialism, coined later by post-colonial thinkers, describes the continued economic and political control of former colonies by their former colonial powers, but through economic means rather than direct military or administrative control. The earliest form of this can lead to part of India while under the colonialization of the British empire, which, according to Iyer, is a form of indirect colonialism, referring to the British government governing certain areas of India through local rulers rather than direct administration and control the colony (India) through economic interference [2]. Neocolonialism can be seen as an extension or evolution of Lenin's idea of economic domination, where multinational corporations and international financial institutions, rather than national monopolies, exert control over developing nations.

2.2 Globalization and Trade Liberalization

The advocacy of Trade Liberalization appeared with the rise of liberalism. Adam Smith, in his book "The Wealth of Nations" successfully embedded the idea that humans are born with the "propensity to truck, barter, and exchange" [3] into the 18th-century world, in which colonialism was at its peak, and the first wave of globalization is just about to come. In "The Wealth of Nations," Smith advocates for putting trust in the market mechanism and the invisible hand to self-adjust because individuals seeking their own economic self-interest unintentionally contribute to the overall economic well-being of society. He believes that with minimum governmental interference, the overall prosperity of society will grow the most, as well as every individual's living standard within that society, and that free trade, or the absence of tariffs and restrictions on imports and exports, is one of the main approaches to reach economic prosperity.

Smith, in his book, also mentioned the concept of absolute advantages, which should a foreign nation provide our nation with a product at a lower cost than we can create it ourselves, we ought to purchase it from them while utilizing a portion of our domestic industry's output to our benefit. Since the nation's general industry is always proportionate to the capital that employs it, it won't be negatively impacted by this; instead, it will be left to figure out how to use it most profitably. [3], and in 1817, based on Smith's theory, David Ricardo developed the concept of competitive advantages in his book "The Principles of Political Economy and Taxation," which said that trade would help both nations even if one is more efficient in manufacturing all commodities than another if they specialize on the manufacture of items for which they have relative efficiency[4]. This concept has become the theoretical basis for modern international trade, as well as most trade liberalization policies and advocacies.

If liberalism gives the ideological foundation for trade liberalization to be born, then globalization provides a perfect environment for it to grow irresistibly. According to Meissner: The late 19th and early 20th centuries saw the beginning of the first "Great Wave of Globalization," which saw a historically unparalleled increase in geographic economic interconnectedness. From 1850 to 1913, trade treaties, including free trade agreements with unconditional most-favored-nation provisions and treaty ports, multiplied, information flows quickened, tariffs dropped, and empires grew. Furthermore, a number of international financial intermediaries prospered, a record number of people migrated to formerly unrest-affected areas, and political and economic calm was generally the rule. [5]. Many Western countries progressively embraced more liberal trade policies throughout the 19th century, hence lowering tariffs and other trade restrictions. This was motivated by the conviction that free trade would provide more efficiency, peaceful international relations, and economic progress.

2.3 Neoliberalism

When talking about the term Neoliberalism, Friedrich Hayek is often seen as the founding father of this ideology. Hayek is an Austrian-born economist who ended up teaching at the University of Chicago. He is known as a defender of the free market and critiques Keynes, who did not see his ideas flourish in 1974. In his work "The Road to Serfdom", Hayek states that central planning and other forms of government economic control stifle individual liberties and consolidate power in the hands of the state. Because economic planning necessitates coercion and control over resources, Hayek thought that even well-meaning attempts to govern the economy would ultimately result in the destruction of individual liberty [6]. Hayek supported free-market capitalism, in which the market, not the government, sets the terms for product creation, distribution, and prices. He thought that instead of concentrating information in the hands of central planners, this system allowed for spontaneous order and the optimal use of knowledge, which is distributed among individuals. Hayek supported free-market capitalism, in which the market, not the government, sets the terms for product creation, distribution, and prices. He thought that instead of concentrating information in the hands of central planners, this system allowed for spontaneous order and the optimal use of knowledge, which is distributed among individuals. Neoliberalism sees the market as the best resource allocator and the protector of individual liberty.

At the University of Chicago, after Hayek, the new leader of the economic school, Milton Friedman, takes the lead in neoliberal ideology. Moreover, he dedicated his life to putting this ideology into practice. Besides being a very successful economist at the University of Chicago, he is also a prosperous politician and policy entrepreneur. He is the close advisor to President Reagan, both President Bushes and the President of Chile at the time after the coup, Pinochet. Friedman contributed greatly to the development of modern economics both in academic and policy practice. His belief in capitalism and market freedom are even more extreme than Hayek, or really any classic liberal scholars. He believes that economic freedom is a necessary approach to achieving political freedom. He advocated for individual rights to participate in the market and believed that the "government can never duplicate the variety and diversity of individual actions." [7]. Friedman suggested that "The invisible hand has been more potent for progress than the visible hand for retrogression", considered free competition to be positive for economic progress, and argued that the unintended consequences of government actions often outweigh their intended benefits.

2.4 Linear Development Models

Often neglecting the complexity of local histories and cultures, linear development theories streamline progress as a straight route from "traditional" to "modern" civilizations. This Western-centric perspective has justified interventions by supporting Western conceptions of development,

therefore strengthening world hierarchies and inequities.

2.4.1 Developmental Narratives

To better understand why modern international relations the way are they are now, we'd have to look back into the theoretical and philosophical basis that's embedded into Western society. Under the paradigm of historical progress, western civilization was looked at as the peak of progress by other people regardless of where they stood on the spectrum, ranging from backwardness to civilization [8]. This hierarchical emphasis became institutionalized through the Enlightenment's stress on reason and progress. It was instrumental in the process of justifying and legitimizing Western interventions and dominations over colonized lands and peoples. Western philosophy and progressivism are sometimes considered one and indivisible because the idea of progress is highly associated with steady social advancement and ultimate happiness. This view posits that human societies' natural development trend is towards forms of government in which individual rights, equality, and representation of the people at crucial decisions prevail.

2.4.2 Orientalism

Orientalism, a concept developed by Edward Said in the late 20th century, can be seen both as a representation of using developmental narratives in an international context and an early version of using Linear Development Models to view the world. According to Said, "Men have always divided the world up into regions having either real or imagined distinction from each other" [9]. Thus, the concept of "west" and "east" is purely fictitious, with the purpose of imperial colonization. Orientalism means "the study of the East," the concept being used for Western nations to have a righteous argument in their colonial actions, which is that the rest of the civilization is "uncivilized," thus, they need other great powers to conquer and govern. One of the supports to this argument is, according to Said: "The period of immense advance in the institutions and content of Orientalism coincides exactly with the period of unparalleled European expansion; from 1815 to 1914 European direct colonial dominion expanded from about 35 percent of the earth's surface to about 85 percent of it"[9]. Just like V. G. Kiernan said orientalism is "Europe's collective daydream of the Orient" [9].

Orientalism, as well as all the "stereotypes" about the East that came with it is an illusion, unobjective feeling about unfamiliar things, like said: "if we agree that all things in history, like history itself, are made by men, then we will appreciate how possible it is for many objects or places or times to be assigned roles and given meanings that acquire objective validity only after the assignments are made". However, this illusion is deeply rooted in Western society and the public's mindset, not because all of them stand with the imperial activities, but simply because that's the only approach they can have to understand the East. "Such "images" of the Orient as this are images in that they represent or stand for a substantial entity, otherwise impossibly diffuse, which they enable one to grasp or see".

2.4.3 "Developed" and "Developing" countries

During the post-WW2 period, international institutions started to be established; the World Bank (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, IBRD) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) appeared in 1944 at the Bretton Woods Conference, with the United Nations (UN), started to group nations according to their degrees of economic growth in order to distribute funds, assistance, and investment. Global economic planning helped to establish the differences between "developed" and "developing" nations. Moving on to the mid-20th century, Scholars, represented by Walt Rostow, started to promote the modernization theory in terms of understanding economic development. In his book "Stages of Economic Growth," he viewed development as a linear path

from "traditional" to "modern" society evolution for nations. His thesis divided nations into many developmental phases, therefore producing a binary of "developed" that's characterized by industrialized, high-income and "developing," which's characterized by agrarian, low-income countries [10], and this argument about the linear development model starts to get widely accepted later on around the world, laid the foundation to how international relations look like today.

2.4.4 World Bank Development Report 1978

The World Bank Development Report is a great representation of understanding how international institutions adapt this linear development model. The report emphasizes the importance of economic growth and increased productivity as the method of reducing poverty [11]. However, it didn't consider the political and societal issues rooted in these regions; these issues, like corruption, might produce an outcome that's not what they expect when proposing a "Western solution" to poverty. Moreover, it did not consider any possible external explanations.

2.4.5 Dependency theory

During the mid-20th century, Raúl Prebisch, in his paper, first introduced the idea that the global economic system was structured to benefit the industrialized "core" countries of the Global North at the expense of the "peripheral" countries of the Global South. His argument is based on the observation of how the terms of trade, the ratio between the export price and import price, of the primary products exported from those "peripheral" countries into the global market decrease and cause systemic inequality [12]. Years later, scholars in the Economic Commission for Latin America, in which Prebisch was the Executive Secretary at some time, further developed his theory into what we know today as the dependency theory. They stated that it is necessary to grow domestic sectors, lessen reliance on foreign investment, and encourage regional economic integration to combat dependency.

Another notable scholar, André Gunder Frank, in his work published in 1966, argues that underdevelopment is not a natural state but instead a consequence of forcing those "peripheral" countries into a structural capitalist system embedded into the global economy led by those "core" countries [13]. As I mentioned in the last section, with the end of WW2 and the trend of globalization, modernization theory became the fundamental thesis for the development economy. However, it emphasized the internal factors of developing countries (like culture, governance, economic and social structure) as causes of underdevelopment and was criticized for ignoring external factors and historical exploitation. Moreover, the reality in developing countries, especially in Latin America, shows that even with significant economic progress, the internal social conditions haven't changed in the same way; inequality and poverty still exist and even worsen. This discrepancy led scholars to question this linear approach to development and look for explanations beyond internal factors.

3. Implication in the last 40 years

Trade liberalization and neoliberal policies have strengthened economic reliance in underdeveloped countries throughout the past forty years. Subjected to these policies, nations like Haiti and Chile have seen rising inequality and dependency on foreign aid or investment, hence highlighting the global power dynamics between the Global North and South.

3.1 Haiti Post-2010 Earthquake

Regarding neocolonialism, Haiti is a place that can't be ignored. Back in the past, Haiti nowadays, the western part of the island of Hispaniola, after being colonized by the French, is called Saint-

Domingue. During the 17th century, due to its plantations of cotton, sugar, and coffee, Saint-Domingue rose to become one of the most prosperous colonies in history. It was maintained via cruel slavery, in which the bulk of the population was made up of enslaved Africans. Inspired by the French Revolution and brutalized by slavery, the population of enslaved people successfully mounted an uprising under the leadership of people like Toussaint Louverture. Haiti became the second sovereign nation in the Americas and the first Black republic to gain independence in 1804. France's colonial empire came to an end with its loss. 1825, Haiti gained independence, but France required it to pay a hefty indemnity (150 million francs) before it could get diplomatic recognition. This "debt" caused Haiti's economic downfall and continued far into the 20th century, weighing heavily on the country and impeding its progress. Citing instability and defending its commercial interests, the United States invaded Haiti in 1915. Although many contend the occupation was exploitative, the United States developed infrastructure, set new laws, and controlled Haiti's finances. After the United States withdrew in 1934, it left behind institutions that continued to represent American dominance, which allowed American economic and political power to endure. A large portion of Haiti's agricultural sector—particularly that of sugar and fruit—was controlled by American firms, which increased the country's reliance on foreign markets and funding. Trade liberalization initiatives frequently helped US businesses more than Haitians. The United States and international institutions like the World Bank and IMF pressured Haiti to enact neoliberal changes, including privatization and trade liberalization, in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. By weakening domestic businesses, these policies increased Haiti's reliance on imports and international aid, particularly from the United States, sustaining its political and economic dependence.

On January 12, 2010, a large-scale earthquake occurred on the West Indian Island of Hispaniola. In the turmoil that followed, an accurate death toll was elusive. Although alternative estimates were far lower, the Haitian government officially counted more than 300,000, making the earthquake's aftermath one of the greatest natural catastrophes in recorded history. Thousands upon thousands of survivors had to find new homes [14]. After the earthquake, the US started a severe action with the claim of humanitarian aid to Haiti. Coordination of the various humanitarian projects fell to former US President Bill Clinton, who was appointed as the UN special envoy to Haiti in May 2009.

However, as many argue afterward, Haitian populations benefit very little from these operations, and the true purpose of these actions falls into the neocolonial agenda. Many donors have withdrawn promises totaling millions of dollars two years after the earthquake. Slightly more than half of the \$4.5 billion that remained committed for the first two years of recovery were received and distributed by the recovery fund. According to information obtained by the Associated Press through a Freedom of Information Act request, just over 10% of the funds released were used for infrastructure improvements, and over \$300 million was spent on projects started before the earthquake—HIV/AIDS mitigation being a major one—because the necessary frameworks were in place. By the end of 2012, around \$6 billion had been issued in total, although a large chunk of that amount had not been spent [14]. According to a June 2013 U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) report, USAID had barely spent a third of the \$1.14 billion in funding that Congress had authorized in 2010 despite the agency being in charge of managing over half of that amount. The GAO report also said that the predicted number of finished homes was cut by 80% due to USAID's significant underestimation of the expenditures associated with a substantial housing project. Foreign corporations received contracts for most of the reconstruction work [15]. After the earthquake, Haiti's subordination to the international community has become something on the stage for everyone to see clearly, but below the stage, this has also been true ever since the independence. According to Alex Dupuy on a NACLA report, Haiti's political and economic reliance on the United States has been strengthened by the neoliberal policies that have been imposed on the nation over the past thirty years. This was made possible by the U.S. government and international financial institutions' (IFIs) dual

strategies of promoting laissez-faire agricultural policy on the one hand, and urban sweatshop garment manufacture on the other. [16].

The reconstruction and so-called “humanitarian aid” after the earthquake are facing a dilemma: whether to give priority to the interests of the poor majority as expressed by grassroots and popular groups, or to the interests of foreign capital and the Haitian corporate class. [16]. Furthermore, this dilemma is not for the Haitian government and people to solve but for the international community, for Western capitalist society, and for the US to solve. Just like 300 years ago, during the Haitian revolution, ironically, the propaganda for national freedom was written in French, the language of the colonizer. Similarly, today, the “Action Plan for the Reconstruction and National Development of Haiti” is written in English. The international community created an Interim Haiti Recovery Commission (IHRC), in which Haitian president René Préal being a non-voting member but only ostensibly retains veto power over the IHRC’s decisions. Bellerive had a direct response when senators from Haiti noted that the nation was essentially ceding its sovereignty to the IHRC: “I hope you sense the dependency in this document. If you don’t feel it, you should tear it up.”[16]. National self-determination in Haiti was already dead before it ever existed.

3.2 Harry S. Truman's Inaugural Address

On January 20, 1949, Harry S. Truman gave his inaugural address at 12:35 p.m. from a platform erected at the east front of the Capitol. In his speech, he didn't mention his vision of America or domestic political goals but only one thing: foreign affairs. According to him, the people of America want and are committed to strive toward a future where every country and every people group may have a dignified and fulfilling life and can freely govern themselves as they see appropriate. Above all, our people really want and are committed to achieving a just and permanent peace on Earth, based on sincere consensus freely reached by equals. In his speech, America is the fixer of the world, which, according to the president, has already been damaged by the communism. Bringing democracy and equality and eliminating poverty became the mission of the United States. Also quoting from his speech: “We have sought no territory. We have imposed our will on none. We have asked for no privileges we would not extend to others...We have encouraged, by precept and example, the expansion of world trade on a sound and fair basis.” These sentences seem to be ironic not only now but even in 1949 when this speech was given. In addition to taking over Native American territory, the United States has a lengthy history of annexing territories, including Texas, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, Guam, the Philippines, and Alaska. Through military occupations, supported dictatorships, and interventions, the United States has repeatedly forced its political and economic will on other nations, especially in Latin America, the Caribbean, and elsewhere. The United States has frequently pursued economic advantages and resource access in developing countries, occasionally through unfair trade agreements and economic policies that favor American businesses at the expense of local communities. Neoliberal policies and trade liberalization initiatives supported by the United States, such as the implementation of structural adjustment programs in the Global South, are clear examples of this, as they have frequently widened the gap between industrialized and developing countries.

Within the speech, President Truman also introduced his “four-point program”, which was to support the international institutions led by the UN, cancel barriers in international trade, strength national defense for allied countries against communism, and apply industrial technology in developing countries [17]. The modernization idea, which contends that impoverished nations will naturally advance through phases of economic growth if exposed to Western technology, capital, and industrial techniques, was represented in Truman's program. According to this linear model, the developing countries might “catch up” to the West while ignoring structural problems that contributed to their poverty, such as imperialism, colonialism, and global power imbalances. The United States

could guarantee access to markets and resources while guiding these nations toward capitalist, market-driven economies that matched American goals during the Cold War by offering aid and technical help.

In reality, initiatives such as Point Four frequently meant imposing neoliberal economic policies that strengthened preexisting disparities and favored American firms. Although these policies promoted foreign investment and trade liberalization, they frequently damaged domestic businesses and increased reliance on money and technology from the West, a defining feature of neocolonialism. Many of the trade liberalization and neoliberal changes implemented in succeeding decades were made possible by President Truman's programs. Exporting Western technology, money, and development models to the Global South was the rationale behind Truman's Point Four Program, and it was repeated in subsequent accords like NAFTA, the USMCA, and the structural adjustment plans mandated by the IMF and World Bank. By providing access to low-cost labor, raw commodities, and new markets, these accords frequently advance the interests of strong Western countries while limiting the capacity of underdeveloped countries to seek independent growth. This strengthens the neocolonial bond between the Global North and South, in which more affluent countries preserve their control by enacting economic laws that serve their interests [18].

3.3 Miracle of Chile

Salvador Allende, a democratically chosen socialist president, oversaw Chile before Pinochet's military takeover in 1973. Allende's government carried out charity programs to lower poverty and nationalize important sectors, including copper. However, his initiatives brought about high inflation, an unstable economy, and mounting political strife between his followers and the conservative opposition. Supported by the United States (by means of covert activities like Project FUBELT), General Augusto Pinochet's Chilean military launched a coup d'état in 1973, therefore toppling Allende's rule. This was the start of an authoritarian military government. Pinochet went to the Chicago Boys to revamp the nation's economic system and rapidly proceeded to destroy Allende's socialist initiatives. The Chicago Boys were a group of Chilean economists who had been trained in the U.S. at the University of Chicago under economists who were proponents of neoliberalism. The Chicago Boys implemented a series of radical economic reforms, often referred to as shock therapy, including drastically reduced tariffs, opening its economy to global markets, encouraging foreign investment and export-led growth; making state-owned companies privatized, and government intervention in the economy reduced; opened up public services, such as education and healthcare to private competition; stabilized the currency, and brought inflation under control through tight monetary policies; rewritten labor laws to reduce the power of unions, resulting in lower wages and weakened collective bargaining rights.

As for the outcome, Chile experienced notable economic expansion in the middle of the 1980s. Chile's GDP had surged, inflation had been under control, and the nation was seen as an example of free-market success in Latin America after Pinochet's presidency. However, the development of this Western narrative comes with consequences. Income disparity got much worse as the GDP rose. The elite and middle classes largely enjoyed the advantages of the economic boom; the working class suffered job uncertainty and pay reduction. Public service privatization mainly affected the underprivileged. Access to pensions, healthcare, and high-quality education became contingent on money, aggravating inequality. This inequality isn't just a direct result but has a long-lasting effect on Chile's economy and society, all the way to the present day. According to the World Inequality Report for 2022, in Chile, the wealthiest 10% earn over 60% of the country's total income, while the lowest 50% barely receive 10%. It is among the most unequal nations in Latin America. Based on current estimations, there has been a significant amount of inequality in Chile throughout the last 120

years. Recent social uprisings have been sparked by the tremendous inequality that still exists in Chile long after the military dictatorship (1973–1990) ended. In Chile today, the poorest 50% have negative average wealth and a significant percentage of debt. [19].

Moreover, political regression also occurred extensively during the reform. According to Friedman, the Chilean economy flourished, but more significantly, a democratic society eventually took the place of the military dictatorship that had controlled the country. The key takeaway from the Chilean business is that a free society was indeed established through the operation of free markets. [20]. But ironically, thousands of political rivals were killed, tortured, or disappeared under Pinochet's rule. The economic reforms took place in a setting where opposition was actively quashed. Both Friedman and Hayek argued that free markets are essential to preserving political freedom. Chile's experience shows that neoliberal economic reforms can be implemented in the absence of political freedom.

Naomi Klein's "The Shock Doctrine" relates Chile's economic change to the wider exploitation of crises (both natural and political) to enforce neoliberal changes, usually resulting in economic restructuring that favors foreign investors and elites at the expense of the local populace. In her words, this is called disaster capitalism, which "orchestrated raids on the public sphere in the wake of catastrophic events, combined with the treatment of disasters as exciting market opportunities." [21]

4. Conclusions

Modern international relations expose the continuing character of global inequality by the continuance of imperialism, neocolonialism, and trade liberalization. Theoretically, the ideas of Lenin and Prebisch highlight how, once under direct colonial authority, economic power has developed into more subdued means of exploitation. Introduced by Harry Truman in his 1949 inauguration speech, the Point Four Program shows how the United States imposed neoliberal ideas on underdeveloped countries using the cover of technical assistance and economic aid. By means of trade liberalization, these countries are frequently under pressure to embrace economic models that serve global powers, therefore strengthening economic dependence rather than promoting real sovereignty. Case studies of Chile's neoliberal change under Pinochet and Haiti's post-2010 earthquake recovery show the negative effects of these policies, thereby aggravating inequality and undermining local businesses. Although praised as instruments for economic development, many times these interventions help elite members and multinational firms at the expense of the poor majority. This article urges a re-examination of world economic systems and policies that support inequality by contesting the presumptions underpinning linear development models supported by international organizations. Development should ultimately give local needs, social equality, and real sovereignty top priority, not act as a vehicle for world capitalism and outside interests.

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