

Foreword

This book starts with a quote from John Dewey defining what genuine help to others consists of (and which the author takes as the best one-sentence statement of the idea):

The best kind of help to others, whenever possible, is indirect, and consists in such modifications of the conditions of life, of the general level of subsistence, as enables them independently to help themselves.

The book uses the interdisciplinary methodology of pointing to similar ideas expressed by a variety of other authors in different fields: management theory by Douglas McGregor, psychotherapy by Carl Rogers, community organizing by Saul Alinsky, community education by Paulo Freire, spiritual counseling by Søren Kierkegaard, and economic development by E. F. Schumacher and myself.

It is important to note the difference between help and perverse, dependency-creating alternatives to self-help. The task is to find forms of help that enable self-reliance and autonomy to come forward. It is time for deep organization experimentation in the ways of development assistance. This can be done by reflecting on the ideas and proposals of the following people:

- Saul Alinsky, with regard to the community organization and the community;
- Paulo Freire, with regard to the relation of the educator and the peasant (or urban poor) community;
- John Dewey, with regard to the relation between teachers and learners;

- Douglas McGregor, with regard to the relation between managers and workers;
- Carl Rogers, with regard to the relation between therapists and clients;
- Søren Kierkegaard, with regard to the relation between teachers and learners;
- E. F. Schumacher, with regard to the relation between the development agency and the country; and
- my own work with regard to the relation between the development advisor and the government.

The aim in all these cases is to design improved or more autonomy-respecting methods of development assistance. The proposals of all these persons are spelled out in detail in chapter 5. The relation between my ideas and those of Paulo Freire is particularly close; so is his relation to Carl Rogers's client-centered therapy.

In the end, the book speaks of a series of ways in which development agencies can experience blocks to learning and singles out the "long confrontation between man and a situation," which, according to Camus, can be so fruitful for the achievement of genuine progress in problem solving. This is the opposite of overconfidence in the solvability of all problems, which Flaubert attacked and named "la rage de vouloir conclure."

Albert O. Hirschman
Professor of Social Science, Emeritus
Institute for Advanced Study