

# Creating a Unified Foundation for Generative Sustainable Development: Research, Practice and Education: the Perspective of a Development Economist and Practitioner.

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## Abstract

This narrative unveils my own understanding of how to foster a unified foundation for generative sustainable development. I invite the reader to consider my insights into my practice as a development economist and practitioner who worked and lived in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Georgia and currently in the Balkan region tackling sustainable development from the perspective of those at the receiving end of aid. By asking the beneficiaries from development interventions what sustainable development is, this journey aims also to communicate how my research is educational for my practical work in developing countries. My research is based on a methodology called Living Educational Theory (LT) that strengthens my ability to contribute to the establishment of the human capabilities of the people I work with in developing countries.

Ultimately drawing from the evidence of both my work and research in practice I wish to clarify my own meaning of 'sustainable development' and how this translates into a more holistic and value-based explanation of 'generative development'. The rise of generative development in relation to sustainable development is emerging from the synergy between LT and Development in practice, which results in a force that may drive human development and be conducive to a fairer world.

*Keywords: Sustainable Development, Human Development, Living Educational theory, Generativity*

## 1. Introduction

This paper offers an account of a process that is influencing my practice as a development economist and practitioner as well as my Living Educational Theory based research. My practice in various developing countries offers me a way of engaging in my own educational development and has evolved my understanding of sustainable development into a more holistic and values-based explanation of development, which becomes generative thus beneficial to a broader group of underprivileged people. Drawing from various practical examples of my professional life in Afghanistan and Ethiopia I describe my own understanding of sustainability and generativity and how these concepts are fundamental for contributing to a fairer world. This exposé will introduce the values-based methodology called Living Educational Theory (Whitehead, 1989), which responds to the need of both development in practice and development studies to utilize a flexible and creative methodology, which helps practitioners and researchers answering questions of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' (ibid.) and that fosters critical reflexivity and encourages self-evaluation and educational development of both the researcher and of the others. My educational development is the process of honing my metacognitive skills in terms of what I am doing in my

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professional life so that I can educate myself so to better contribute to supporting people in developing their capabilities. The quality of love, sharing, and collaborating represents the foundation for my practice as a Living Theory researcher and my practice as a development economist developing my capabilities, happiness and fulfilment.

'If I can help one person and that person can help another person than it becomes a change.' (Kakenya Ntaiya)

## 2. Defining 'the poor'

More than ten years ago I made the personal and professional choice to work exclusively in developing countries as a development economist and practitioner where I attempt to support people in their daily struggle for existence. As a professional who manages development initiatives around the world, I attempt to contribute to both economic growth and to the establishment of human capabilities that encourage innovative forms of personal and social evolution, rooted in peace and freedom, leading eventually as well to economic freedom. By doing this I am living in the direction of the development of my own capabilities, happiness and fulfillment (Briganti, 2015).

My considerations about development emerge from the practical experience I have gained in more than a decade (and I am still gaining) as a development practitioner. My account results from years of fieldwork in contact with the end beneficiaries of aid and development interventions. In the international development narrative the end beneficiaries of aid and development interventions are often referred to as 'the poor'. 'The poor' are considered as a homogenous group of individuals regardless of differences of race, gender, religion, ethnicity, socio-historical background, sexual orientation, physical, mental, emotional or learning ability.

So it feels, as it was the 'stereotypization' of something that in my opinion is not possible to and should not be categorized. The widespread mistakes that often international development organizations do is threefold: first is to regard 'the poor' as something easily definable, as an homogenous cluster. Second is to look for a unified solution that would answer a unified problem. Third 'the poor' are treated as a problem and not as people with individual feelings, wishes, capabilities, strengths, weaknesses, values, and beliefs that make each individual unique and distinctive and facing the issues that we, as human beings, are confronted with in life. The former president of Uruguay Jose' Mujica reacts against the label of 'poor' given to him by those who might disagree with his frugal lifestyle when he argues:

'Poor are the ones who describe me so. My definition of poor is those who need too much, because those who need too much are never satisfied. I'm frugal not poor...frugal with a light suitcase. I live with little just what's necessary, not too tied down to material things. Why? So I can have more free time. To do what? To do what I like. Freedom is having time to live. Living frugally is a philosophy of life, but I'm not poor.' (José Mujica, 2013)

I relate with the above thoughts since according to my practical experience it is unfair and inaccurate to put a label on a person's condition based on my evaluative judgments. Only those who are directly concerned can define their condition:

We ridiculed representation and said it was finished, but we failed to draw the consequences of this "theoretical" conversion - to appreciate the theoretical fact that only those directly concerned can speak in a practical way on their own behalf. (Foucault, 1980)

My job is to listen to those people and help them find tailor -made solutions to their troubles. Hence, for the sake of this written narrative I opt for the term 'underprivileged' leaving to those directly cornered to define the privilege they have been deprived of. Those people provided me the evidence that certain measures used to tackle development intervention are more beneficial to them than others. They also informed my understanding of poverty. I have the duty to listen to them, to their vision, to their aspiration, and adjust and re-adjust my work according to what people find more favourable to their lives' improvement.

I don't believe that it's only my voice speaking in this narrative. I'm doing the mere exercise to compile data and present them in an academic form. Those data are the lived experience of those I work for in development countries. Out of respect for those people I hope I am good enough at 'packaging' their stories and write about them, with the desire to be authentic as much as possible and ethical in the way I communicate their lives to the reader. I'd like to show that where I stand theoretically, practically and ontologically is a result of experience and reflections as well as of being a reflective practitioner (Schön, 1991). As a Living Theory researcher my practice is what informs my theory and not vice versa:

...all citizens who are concerned with the future of our planet and humanity should produce a story for themselves and others to account for their contribution to the creation of a more peaceful, just and productive world'.(Whitehead, 1993)

My practical knowledge grows stronger due to what I am taught by the many people I have the privilege to work with in various developing countries, who are the end beneficiaries of my job as a development practitioner. I am therefore grateful to Polanyi's account of personal knowledge where:

'He set out to free us from the sense of obligation we feel towards scientific ideals that rendered dubious the ontological integrity of anything that couldn't be made explicit to objective investigation inviting us to enter avenues of legitimate access to reality from which objectivism debar us.' (Doede)

However I would be dishonest if I did not admit that I feel vindicated by the narrative of writers of the calibre of Amartya Sen, Muhammad Yunus, Robert Chambers, Ugo Slim, Pancho Otero and so on that I like to be inspired by. These development practitioners, researchers and writers have a common thread: they all worked hand in hand with the beneficiaries of their interventions. What they report on is not theory, instead it is what they have learnt and been taught during years on the field. Their ideas also emerge from their practice. They have been then so extraordinarily capable and generous to share their experiences and their findings and the findings of other people with all of us. Development in practice is by its very nature performed in practice and on a daily basis. The reason is trivial: it takes time to listen to people, talk to them and establish a rapport with them. It takes time to build trust without which development can only fail. And it takes time to understand what sustainable development means to them and what to do to make it beneficial to human development.

### 3. Empathy

Imagining what it is like to be someone other than yourself is at the core of our humanity. It is the essence of compassion, and it is the beginning of morality. (Ian McEwan)

To engage in development work takes patience, humbleness, courage especially the courage to fail, and a profound faith in humanity. Above all it takes empathy. I believe that empathy can be a collective force with the power to change society (Krznicaric, 2014). The key question to start understanding how development becomes sustainable, contributes to a fairer world and make the difference to the lives of many under privileged as well underserved people is: how is it to be you?

A missionary priest who spent his entire life working with vulnerable and underprivileged people in slum-like villages in Latin America, once said :

If you don't eat with them in the first place, don't even think you'll have any chance to establish a working relationship with them.

This is the essence of development in practice. Sometimes I believe it's as simple as sharing a meal together. In the word 'sharing' lies the key significance of sustainable development. In fact it's about building quality relationships with the community. By this I mean to establish a relationship that implies the recognition that as we are all human being we are ontological siblings (Barron, 2015).

Fukuyama (1992) also stresses the importance of 'recognition':

Human beings seek recognition of their own worth, or of the people, things, or principles that they invest with worth. The desire for recognition, and the accompanying emotions of anger, shame and pride, are parts of the human personality critical to political life. According to Hegel, they are what drives the whole historical process. (Fukuyama, 1992, p. xvii)

The first steps feel simple, but make a huge difference.

I start by sharing my life with them, I eat with them, sit with them in their homes and take my time for informal chat about family and life. People are open to welcoming me into their culture and I react accordingly, tiptoeing into their lives, discreetly and showing respect for who they are: human beings like me. Empathy helped me unveiling myself to them for what I was: a human being with vulnerabilities and the courage to admit them. By admitting to myself and to the others around me that I was not a super-person with answers to any questions and solutions to any problem I have also obtained respect (sometimes) for being brave and showing my fallibility, my ignorance in very many matters, and my willingness to listen and to learn from other people's experiences.

In such a situation I feel, that I become the 'object' of their interest. They seem to be curious as much as I am in understanding who they are and what they want. Some of the people I met and worked with were in many occasions 'scanning' me and the biases about white western people especially (and our well known arrogance mixed with ignorance) have been often part of their evaluation. Some of my local colleagues and beneficiaries told me about the curiosity and skepticism that I triggered during informal conversations we had throughout the years we spent working together.

Empathy simplifies my personal 'scanning process' a lot. Instead of acting as someone who is so insecure about the given convoluted situation to pretend to know everything

better, I prefer (but I've learnt from my failures) to overtly show my insecurity and uncertainties in front of the many conundrums I have been asked to deal with (by the international development organizations I work for that implement development initiatives in developing countries).

Hence, I divert my interest from my selfish and unsecure self, to the feelings of the other person who is the recipient of aid and often is not being asked whether and what kind of help she/he wants. Moreover I honestly can't claim that:

I know how it feels, when the war killed your entire family because of a different ethnic group it belonged to; when you lost your entire harvest and thus there is no possibility that you and your family will have something to eat in the near future; when your country has been bombed and you had to run away and ask for asylum in another country; when you were forced to marry at the age of 6 with a man of age 45; when you have been abducted and used as a child soldier; when you have contracted HIV; when you are 32 mother of six, you've never been to school, and you are not allowed to leave your habitation without a male member of the family; when the war separated you from your spouse who left you with three very young children, no job, shelter or money; when you left your country looking for a better future, but have been smuggled in another continent where you have no legal status, no identification paper, no rights to be.

I cannot respond to these life accounts pretending that I know how this feels and that I have solutions to this inexplicable sorrow. So I simply don't do it. This is where I rely completely on my empathic self and I let this part of me speaking for myself. It is often a non-verbal language the one that spontaneously emerges and that helps me communicate my message, which I can paraphrase as follows:

I am exactly what you think I am. I am a privileged, spoiled, white young educated woman who has no clues of your pain and your tragedy simply because I was never where you are now and the likelihood I will experience on my own skin what you are experiencing now are almost non-existent. I can't wash away the pain and I can't cancel what happened to you and your loved ones. However I am also a person who is genuinely here to help you helping yourself. What I can offer you is nothing more than a chance that might lead the both of us to a change. No guarantees of success, no silver bullet only hard work, commitment, discipline, various failures to learn from, but also compassion, faith in your abilities, love and respect. Shall we try?

The more people decide to 'try' and entrust me with the privilege to accompany them throughout the journey, the more we both become able to commonly create spaces for developing resolutions to the problems. I call this an act of faith. I have to have faith in human capabilities and in the possibility to build a fairer world. On the other hand, my co-travellers have to have faith in me as someone who values their lives enormously, sees and values their unique human capabilities and wants nothing more than being part of the process that might drive a positive change in their existence. According to my practical engagement, development is an act of love and faith.

By love I don't refer to romantic love. I see love as a mature answer to the problem of existence (Fromm, 1957). In Fromm's words mature love is a union under the condition to preserve each others' integrity, one's individuality. Love is primarily giving, not receiving [...] giving is more joyous than receiving, not because it is a deprivation, but

because in the act of giving lies the expression of my aliveness. [...] Not he who has much is rich, but he who gives much (ibid.).

I'd like to stress the aspect of preserving each other identity and integrity, which is key to sustainable development in my eyes. The dependency of the end beneficiary of development intervention on the development agency/worker has to be avoided by all means if sustainability is going to occur.

I utterly value the notion of environmental sustainability that promotes growth, progress and consumption in an ecologically friendly way (Thatchenkery, Avital, and Cooperrider, 2015) by meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p.43). Moreover I also concur with the necessity of shifting the global discussion on sustainable values (ibid.), which offers a holistic approach to the issue of environmental sustainability by considering the values of both the shareholders and the stakeholders (Thatchenkery, Avital, and Cooperrider, 2015). However, in this narrative, by sustainability I refer to the capacity of an underprivileged individual to provide for themselves after having acquired the ability to assess and solve their own problems, without external support. I believe that sustainable development is in place once people are capable of contributing to the building of a society in which inclusion, gender-equality, cultural cohesion, equity, educational development, respect for diversities and the natural environment are recognized as fundamental values. My understanding of sustainable development is concerned with the holistic development of the people I work with (i.e. emotional, psychological, spiritual, economic, etc.), with their human development as well as my human development (Briganti, 2015).

As a development worker I see myself working towards enabling people in reaching sustainable development, which implies that my support comes with an expiry date, thus I aim at being made redundant. After many years of field work in constant contact with people is a life-affirming experience to see that they are ready to continue their lives without my support. I'm also aware that I need to carefully avoid to feel depended on them. Still it's hard to leave and say good-bye after years of collaboration. I know that in the act of giving I have been sharing a lot about myself with both my co-workers and the beneficiaries of our projects, in fact as a human being it's in the act of sharing that I feel most strongly my sense of aliveness:

'What does one person give to another? He gives of himself of the most precious he has, he gives of his life. This does not necessary mean that he sacrifices his life for the other- but the he gives him of that which is alive in him; he gives him of his joy, of his interest, of his understanding, of his knowledge, of his humour, of his sadness-of all expressions and manifestations of what which is alive in him. In thus giving of his life, he enriched the other person, he enhances the other's sense of aliveness by enhancing his own sense of aliveness.' (Fromm, 1957)

My personal definition of aliveness resonates with my meaning of happiness. I have asked myself what makes people feel happy? And what can I do to help people in gaining a better quality of life? In the World Happiness Report 2016 Sachs draws an interesting parallel between the United Nations 2030 Agenda that deals with the 17 Sustainable development Goals. These affirm that happiness is embedded in the idea that the 'good society' should focus on the triple bottom line of economic prosperity, social inclusion

and environmental sustainability and the encyclical *Laudato Si'* by Pope Francis (Sachs, 2016). In his Encyclical Letter Pope Francis argues that:

...the urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change. (The Holy Father Francis, 2015)

The need for a change is what drives Living Theory researchers from all over the world to work for a fairer world and for the flourishing of humanity (Whitehead, 1989). In the international development context the world 'change' has been sapiently used by Chambers (2005) to condense a complex and multifaceted issue such as development that he defines as: a good change. Some academics might feel the irrepressible impulse to unleash their sharp capacity to deconstruct concepts, values, theories, and so on, and argue that 'good' and 'bad' are empty words as well as culturally and historically constructed. However, besides the intellectual ability that many have or would want to have to conceptualize almost everything (I admit that I was also affected by this condition), I decide to bear the risks and the consequences of making unsubstantiated claims which are closer to my primordial spectrum than to the intellectual one such as: certain things are just good! Good is the change that makes the lives of underprivileged people less miserable and perhaps even filled with glimpses of happiness. Good is the change that gives back dignity and hope to people. Good is when people that used to behave as enemies, fraternize and help each other transcending religion, race, culture, norm, and politics in the name of humanity.

I am drawn to Husserl's point about the transcendental sphere of knowing:

... in the transcendental sphere we have an infinitude of knowledge previous to all deduction, knowledge whose mediated connections (those of intentional implication) have nothing to do with deduction, and being entirely intuitive prove refractory to every methodically devised scheme of constructive symbolism. (Husserl, 1912, p. 12).

I believe that happiness is the result of a good change in society such as an amelioration of the social condition, work condition, health, education, pollution, income and last but not least it is about the values that bring us closer to our humanity. According to Sachs, and I could not agree more with the libertarian argument that economic freedom per se in the major direct contributor of human well-being and should be championed above all other values decisively fails the happiness test (Sachs, 2016).

#### **4. Sustainable development in Afghanistan**

During my assignment in Afghanistan I was in charge of a socio-economic development project, labelled 'Literacy and Vocational Education Project for the promotion of activities to generate revenue in favour of vulnerable Afghan women', which targeted vulnerable and neglected women living in a completely dilapidated district in the outskirts of Kabul. The ultimate aim of the project funded and implemented by a European governmental organization was to empower women and consistently free them from the burden and the diseases of poverty (Allan and Thomas, 2000) they were affected by, and at the same time to provide them with economic security.

In 2007 both my senior colleague and myself interviewed several projects' beneficiaries. Shakiba who at the time of the interview was 27 years old and mother of

six replied in the following way to the question: 'which is the advantage of being a woman?'

If you have a good husband and no financial problems, it is good to be a woman, otherwise women that live the life I live should not continue to live.

A vocational education centre has been set up with the scope to offer to sixty vulnerable women integrated Skills Development Training (SDT) in four areas namely: restaurant and catering, gem cutting and design, mobile phone repair, and solar lantern assembly. These subjects have been selected after having undergone a focused market study on the need and the demand of the area and its population in those years. Nevertheless the start of the project was more challenging than expected, due to the high level of illiteracy widespread among our beneficiaries who often could not recognize numbers, weights, measures, or even tell the time. The SDT has been facilitated simultaneously with literacy courses in Dari (one of the two Afghan official languages). Moreover the need expressed by the trainees led the team to introduce a basic course of English language, basic public health and hygiene training.

Further challenges, I would argue the most difficult to overcome, derived from the Afghan male-centred customs, which Shaimà -32 years old trainee and mother of four- has defined it this way:

In Afghanistan a man works and earns the money and provides the family with food, while a woman takes care of the house and the children.

This patriarchal view influenced the attitudes and propensities of the women, leapfrogging over their needs and desires. Shaimà when asked about her wishes said:

I know everything about children, husband and house but I know nothing more. I want to study and learn everything, but I have too many problems and I can't concentrate. This is why I've learnt so little so far.

After these first interviews I started wondering what do I really know about the values and wishes of Afghan women or at least of the women I was so close to and working with every day? My gender plays a crucial role in how I carry out my practice and influences it. When I was living in Afghanistan the way I was considered in a male-centric society has steered my decisions and acting and might have generated more biases. And more importantly, if I knew so little about those women how could I possibly build the kind of trust needed to work together, trust of the kind that transcends cultural boundaries and biases and is conducive to a mutual understanding and respect for each other's values?

Gul Makai - 50 years old, widow and mother of seven - while interviewed by my senior colleague said:

You have developed this program and we like it. At the beginning the problem was that we did not know you at all. We did not know your language. With you we could not share.

The many women I have worked with have been denied many human rights for most of their lives. Moreover I deem it is useful to stress that the majority of the women I was working with, at the very beginning of the project, appeared convinced that they were worthless, not worth listening to, not worth being taught, because they were seen as



incapable of doing anything else but bearing children. They were not even worthy of love.

Shaimà said:

There are no good men in Afghanistan. None understands women or are concerned with their personality. They do with women what they want. They beat us. This is the war's fault that has sickened the head of our men.

So the project helps me understand the Afghan women's insights better and I attempted to use this understanding to help them unveiling their values and their meanings and what would fill their lives with glimpses of happiness.

Shakiba said:

Before working in this project I was working with another group of women' (she mentions the name of the international NGO running the project). 'We were taught how to make mattresses, clothes or embroideries. I have chosen do make mattresses since I knew already how it works. We were also taught how to read and write. We did not sell the mattresses we have produced, since the organization gave them to the refugees. We were paid in kind with rice, beans, oil and flour. One could have stayed with them for 5 years, and then you had to leave and try to work on your own. I wanted to stay longer but I was pregnant again and I could not produce mattresses the whole day. Moreover my daughter started to be sick and I stayed at home with her. When I went back to the training centre they have sent me away.

Hence, the team has detached itself from what has seemed to be an objectivisation of women's needs. Instead, drawing from Popper's (1975) inter-subjective-criticism, we wanted to recognize the distinctive beneficiaries' perception of concepts such as economic independence, human development and emancipation, as subjective. This 'unquestioning acceptance' of normative rules and practices 'by practitioners often contributes {albeit unwittingly} to reproducing the existing social order and so perpetuates them' (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006: 101).

In the Afghan scenario this has translated into various projects that conformed to cultural stereotypes (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2009) and instead of fostering women's emancipation and education were, I believe, constraining both their personal and professional development. The broadest western stereotypes of Afghan woman transmuted into innumerable women trained as tailors, embroiderers or in any other home-based activity, regardless of the market demand and regretfully regardless of women's wishes and talent. Our team has embraced a gendered-approach to women's private and public participation, which become another paramount goal of the project. The project's gendered-approach is an attempt to merge both the female and the male vision of women's need, capabilities, values and wishes. Our scope was to provide a constructive critique to the mainstream Afghan societal code of conduct and at the same time to lay the foundation of a new, accepted, equal and balanced social construct. The interviews with the beneficiaries helped to evaluate the project while it was still running and unfolded the meanings of the above concepts as they emerged in practice. We started looking for clues by listening to those people receiving the assistance (Anderson, Brown and Jean, 2012). From the one-to-one semi-structured interviews carried out with some of the beneficiaries emerged the sense of self-realization, self-accomplishment and freedom that these women enjoyed during the training and after the completion of it,

when they commenced working. Women feel respected not because they have started supporting financially the household, but as one of project's newly born professionals, Fozyia -42 years old and mother of four, said:

'Is not about the money that I earn now. Is because my husband is amazed by my abilities as gem cutter and he likes the job that I'm doing. He did not know that I could work and he did not know that I could be so good. He is proud of me now. I feel respected.'

Nafissa -40 years old and mother of 4-said:

'My children look at me in a different way now that I leave my house every morning to go to work. Now that I can read and write like them.'

To me this is the most important achievement the project can boast about. According to what they've said, since no one has ever considered them as human being with their own distinctive wishes and capabilities, they also have convinced themselves to have none. It was a life-affirming (Whitehead, 1989) experience to unveil their humanity and their many capabilities.

The team that I was leading was formed by both national and international colleagues and has adopted a people-centred approach aimed at influencing the development of the entire community (Woodhouse, 2000, p. 160) and not only our direct beneficiaries. Conscious of the project's boundaries, both financial and technical that limited the number of the people we could assist in a given period of time, we had to develop a way of spreading the positive influence of the project in an exponential way rather than in a linear manner. We focused our job on significant topics such as how to ameliorate the quality of people's life, how to support them in the process of becoming the agent of their own change (Sen, 1999), and consequently how to influence others in undergoing the same process of change.

The team's understanding of development aimed at satisfying human needs by giving everybody equal opportunities. We have also distinguished this human development from immanent capitalist development (Allen and Thomas, 2002, p.25) focused on economic growth and laissez-faire trade, from which we distanced ourselves. The main assumption we have based our project on is that development is an all-encompassing change (ibid.) and that implies a long process going from policy making to public action through the actors, namely the State, the private sector and the civil society which steer, enable and contest development. However, as a living theory researcher who puts values at the core of the investigation, I have come to the conclusion that all the above was not enough to make our initiative successful. I attempted at transferring my values of equality, respect for diversity, educational development, human freedom in our project's activities, by merging them with the effort of placing the accent on gender and not only on women. These values are liable to different interpretations according to the socio-historical understandings of the diverse contexts in which people live and work. In the course of the project's life the more I became acquainted with the Afghan culture, the more I've unveiled the Afghan interpretation of equality, respect for diversity, educational development and human freedom. There is a discrepancy between my perception grounded in my own culture and the Afghan perception (often steered by men) of educational development and human freedom. The project transcended its

technical goals and has showed me a way of merging two apparently antithetical standpoints.

## 5. The notion of generative development

After many experiences in various challenging regions I recently started to wonder what comes after sustainability? In other words as a development economist and practitioner is my ultimate goal to assist underprivileged people reaching sustainability only?

The very first time I heard the term 'generativity' was during a discussion I had with an environmentalist about a slum upgrading and poverty reduction project I was part of in Eastern Ethiopia. The project was concerned with a UNESCO World Heritage Site city, which the local Government asked an international development organization to help revitalising. One of the aims was to restore the ancient core and its distinctive heritage houses. As a pilot initiative the team started with the restoration of one of the historical houses. The ancient city had neither electricity, nor potable water and sewage system. The majority of the local population lived in extreme poverty. The only sector that was generating a minimum income was agriculture, however the production was often sufficient only for the farmer's and his family's basic subsistence. In that area drought represented often an added challenge. The pilot- project house was eventually restored using local materials, local building traditions and local craftspeople. To electrify the house we used renewable energy sources and also to provide water. A septic tank has been built to collect the wastage. The owner was very pleased with the result and transformed the house into a bed and breakfast (at that time the tourism sector was slowly showing some encouraging records).The local Government used that positive result for lobbying the private sector and engaging it in more restoration works as well as investments in the tourism sector. Some years after this project ended I discussed the case with an environmentalist who suggested that I could have rendered the project 'generative'. He proposed to re-use the content of the septic tanks of the newly restored houses for agricultural purposes. The idea persuaded me completely. I did not have the possibility to implement his suggestions, so I don't know whether from an agricultural point of view it made sense and we could really have provided a boost to the agricultural sector. However our discussion triggered my first thoughts around the evolution of sustainability into generativity. When I thought my job was concluded, since the houses we restored were fully 'sustaining themselves' in a environmentally friendly manner and provided the local population with means for engaging in income generating activities, I was shown a way of generating something new. I was challenged to have a broader view and look beyond sustainability. I asked myself: 'what if sustainability is not enough and we have the possibility to have greater impact on the local people, an impact that is not limited to our generation?'

I believe that sustainability evolves into a self-perpetuating force that can make greatest contribution to human capabilities. Volckmann argues that generativity involves supporting the thriving of present and future generations (2013).This concept had been raised and made clear to me by some of the people I helped out of poverty by strengthening their human capabilities. However it took me more than ten years to

process what happened at that time and come to the realisation that some events in my professional life marked the genesis of my understanding of generativity.

In 2005 while I was working in Ethiopia, I met three very young destitute sisters named Semira (age twelve), Salwa (age nine) and Fozyia (age six). The girls were completely marginalised by the society, lived in inhumane conditions with no access to housing, education, potable water or sufficient food and exposed to all sorts of risks. They were living in a slum-like area of the city's outskirts with their mother, a widow and informal worker whose daily wage would not suffice even to buy enough food for all of them. The family has been helped to help itself out of poverty in various ways. The girls have been enrolled in school and the mother underwent professional training education in order to give her the opportunity to find a better job that could allow her to sustain her household. The family has been moved to a safer city quarter and given a decent accommodation with basic hygiene condition such as running water and electricity to minimise the spread of infectious diseases. The mother eventually found a good employment as housemate and cook. More than ten years later, one of the three sisters Salwa (currently 19 years old and a high school excellent student) had a conversation with me on how life can change for the better if underprivileged individuals are given a chance. Moreover she raises the issue of generativity when she explains her desire to support other underprivileged people in the same way she and her family have been supported in the past. In the following videos Salwa is showing the impact that the help she was provided with at that time has transformed in her into a desire to help other people who live in the same condition she used to be. She is already helping underprivileged people living in her neighbourhood together with her classmates and teachers. In the second clip Salwa talks about what is she doing to fight for people's right. The focus is on young girls being victims of female genital mutilation (FGM), sexual violence and early marriage.

*Video 1. Sabwa Ismail and Arianna Briganti (Briganti, 2015)*

*Video 2. Sabwa Ismail and Arianna Briganti (Briganti, 2015)*

*Video 3. Sabwa Ismail and Arianna Briganti (Briganti, 2015)*

*Video 4. Sabwa Ismail and Arianna Briganti (Briganti, 2015)*

*Video 5. Sabwa Ismail and Arianna Briganti (Briganti, 2015)*

In a recent private conversation with the oldest sister Semira (currently 24 years old and university student at the university of Mekelle, Ethiopia) and myself, she writes:

‘Good Morning Ariye! Yesterday it was my happiest day since I move here to Mekelle. I was at the theatre in the afternoon and than my friend took me somewhere and that somewhere made my day beautiful and great. We went to visit some poor children supported by the charity club. They were celebrating the Ethiopian Eastern and we celebrated with them for the whole day until 9 pm. I danced with them, I ate with them and played with them. They were so happy and smiled for the whole time, isn't this beautiful? I've been introduced to the children and they welcomed me with a smile, now I'm the new member of the charity club. I can feel now that I'm already rich, because till now I was receiving your love and now I start giving my love to someone who need it

and can make good use of it. You Ariye [...] gave me a good picture of helping people and giving love'. (Email conversation, 2016)

Both Salwa's and Semira's account unveil the essence of the self-perpetuating energy I call generativity, which nurtures the blossoming of the next generation and is the consequential result of sustainability.

The following reflection resonates with my understanding of generativity:

'In essence, generativity is the act of preparing another's garden for spring. It's power in the service of love. It's an act of giving that enables another person to manifest his or her own strengths and gifts through love... Generativity protects our mental and physical health across an entire lifespan. When we nurture others, we nurture ourselves.' (Valliant, 2002)

## 6. Living Educational Theory and Generative Development

Chambers, in one of his latest publications, argues that despite many decades of experience in both development studies and development in practice, methodology is still a relatively neglected subject in development studies thus he advocates for the usage of more flexible and innovative ones (2014). I concur with his view in favour of a tailor-made methodology that provides the flexibility and innovation needed to have a more positive impact of the target beneficiaries. Moreover, according to my experience the sector has to bring both ethics and values more prominently into the discourse if development is to make the greatest contribution to a fairer world and the flourishing of humanity (Whitehead, 1989). Hence I have chosen to use a values-based methodology called Living Educational Theory (LT) that strengthens my ability to contribute to the establishment of the human capabilities of the people I work with in developing countries by seeking answers to the following questions: 'How do I contribute to the empowerment of individuals and support them in building their human capacities?'

In fact, the rise of generative development in relation to sustainable development is emerging from my research enquiry as well as from my values as a development worker and represents the synergy between LT and development in practice. This results in a force that may drive human development and be conducive to a fairer world. LT creates the unified foundation for generative sustainable development and provides me with a space where my experiences, values, practice, feelings are respected and my voice is heard. In this space I feel free from social hindrances since as a self-study researcher I can express myself using various research techniques. By this I mean my methodological inventiveness (Dadds and Hart, 2001, p. 169). This helps me in exploring the implications of asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' (Whitehead, 1989) using various research methods such as auto-ethnography (Ellis, Adams and Bocher, 2011, p. 273). It also helps me to research, analyse, explain my personal experience and be critically reflexive about my practice in order to understand social formations based on cultures different from mine and what can I do to improve people wellbeing. In fact one of the critiques moved on development studies is the lack of transparent reflexivity:

Willingness to examine and present personal predispositions seems inversely related to the conviction, passion and rigidity with which views are held and thought.(Chambers, 2016, p. 17)

LT research brings people and their different practice together with the scope of learning, inspiring and influencing each other. It's a place where critique has no negative connotation, but instead it's perceived as a valuable way of improving one's own practice. I have the opportunity not only to improve what I'm doing (Whitehead, 1989) but also to share it with all those who have embarked on a similar journey and are occupied with making the world a fairer place.

## Conclusion

I have argued that Living Theory research can contribute to the creation of a unified foundation for Generative Sustainable Development: research, practice and education: the perspective of a development economist and practitioner. I recognise that such a unified foundation needs to rest on Living Theory research as a social movement. By this I mean that the development of this unified foundation will require many development economists and practitioners to work and research together in generating and sharing their living-educational-theories as they account for their lives in explanations of their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of social formations, with values that carry hope for the flourishing of humanity.

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