

Stereotypes Used in Teaching International Agriculture Impede Communication

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The purpose of this paper is to cause teachers, students, public officials and others in International Agriculture to contemplate how the use of so-called derogatory adjectives portrays judgement and negativism upon other nations and societies creating harm for future relations. These questions are posed:

1. Is it condescending that some nations be referred to as "developing," "lesser developed," "third world," "fourth world," "underdeveloped," "less fortunate," "backward," "primitive," "undeveloped," "emerging," or "poor" while others as second world nations, and still others as first world nations?
2. Can a nation and its society be unquestionably judged and ranked into one of these categories merely based upon its economic status, social standards, political system, religious orientation or a combination of these variables?

The word "developing" is on everyone's tongue; in newspapers, on television, and in the lecture hall one reads or hears of the developing world, or underdevelopment, or the Third World. What do all these terms mean (de Souza, 1989)?

The adjectives used in Western countries to describe the other countries of the world have had a curious and changing history in the past half century according to de Souza (1989). De Souza said that the terms "primitive" and "backward" were used interchangeably until Truman's Point IV Program was set forth in 1949, after which "underdeveloped" became pre-eminent. In the early 1950s, the first years of the United Nations, the term changed to "underdeveloped." By the late 1950s and during the 1960s, many colonies gained independence and seats in the United Nations General Assembly. The need to consider the feelings of the new U.N. representatives led to a search for a more hopeful sounding word. The term "the developing countries," which was subsequently improved to read "the rapidly developing countries" was adopted. Because of de Souza's observations, these questions arise:

1. Is it condescending that some nations be referred to as "developing," "lesser developed," "third world,"

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Classroom teachers, student consultants, program administrators and others working in International Agriculture and related International fields should think and debate about any use of so-called derogatory adjectives that portrays judgement and negativism upon other societies. Varying points of view are needed to impede stereotype conclusions. Persons in International work should see to know what is true and what is not.

1. What is a so-called developed nation?
2. When specifically does a country qualify to be considered a "developed," or "first world" nation?

Gamer (1976) claimed "We have developed a tendency to judge Africa, Asia, and Latin America by some of the standards that appeared to apply in Europe and North America during the past century." However, Ali (1989) described many of the nations on these continents as the "Third World," meaning "...a non-cohesive group of economically underdeveloped countries located in Asia, Africa, and Latin America..." For the sake of argument and discussion, the following terms were defined in *Websters Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (1990). However, this is not to infer that these definitions are the official definitions that categorize other nations, but are intended to establish a basis to initiate thinking and discussion.

1. *Developing*: state of being developed.
2. *First world*: the western industrialized non-communist nations.
3. *Lesser*: of less size, quality, or significance.
4. *Poor*: lacking material possessions; of, relating to, or characterized by poverty.
5. *Second world*: the communist nations as a political and economic block.
6. *Third world*: a group of nations especially in Africa and Asia that are not aligned with either the communist or the non-communist blocks. The aggregate of underdeveloped nations of the world.
7. *Underdeveloped*: having a relatively low economic level of individual production and standard of living.

These terms, used so often by fellow International Agriculture teachers, journalists, government leaders, international donor agencies, authors, sociologists, economists,

intellectuals, and others denote an air of negativism and superiority. Negativism is implied in that an attitude is influenced by skepticism about a country and its people as affirmed by opinions of others. And when opinions are molded by the economic level and/or political system within a country, negative connotations often result. Superiority is implied in the sense that those of so-called first world countries perceive themselves as being more haughty when referring to an allegedly third world country.

Griffin (1969) wrote in his preface: "I have come to believe that underdevelopment is a process that is sustained by existing national and international institutions." If Griffin's notion that underdevelopment is a process sustained by institutions such as United States Agency for International Development, or World Bank, or United Nations, then:

1. What are the advantages of sustaining "underdevelopment?"
2. Do these advantages make it necessary to use adjectives that insinuate judgement?
3. How do world traders or educators or politicians benefit by naming countries first with an adjective that portrays their economic, political, social, or religious orientations?

Szentes (1971) commented, the word developing is a "polite epithet ...it is strange to apply the term to the least developing part of the world economy." Furthermore, de Souza (1974) claimed that the word "developing" is a euphemism. He said we should be aware that it is used frequently to suggest that rich industrial nations are exempt from development in the sense that they have completed the development process. Rather than to develop, they are assumed to enjoy continuous growth. If the views of Szentes and de Souza are accurate, then:

1. Would it be reasonable to use terms that infer a sense of sameness, or equality in status, or an impartial counterpart? For example, terms such as "nation," "kingdom," "republic," "peoples republic," "state," "country," or simply using the "name" of the country such as Chili. Or in a broader sense, terms such as "Sahel nations," "other nations," "African nations," "South American countries," "Latin American countries," or "Asian nations."
2. Would the world traders or politicians or educators view a nation differently if the adjective were deleted that describes it's economic or political orientation?

Ali (1989) said "Many developing countries are nations only in a technical sense. Their culture and civilizations date back to time immemorial and have in them good as well as bad elements..." If Ali's postulation is correct,

1. Can nations retain the basic elements of their culture and still be acknowledged as an equal within the world community of nations?
2. Can nations sustain their individuality and character and still enter into the age of science and technology?

One cannot assume that personal opinions, formed by the influences of economic and/or political factors, can be considered true knowledge. There are basically two problems in making such assumptions. One concerns itself with the

authenticity and accuracy of the "knowledge" itself (Morris, 1961).

1. Are the methods used to judge other nations based upon empirical knowledge or mythical knowledge? Empirical knowledge here meaning that data were gathered in a systematic manner to assist the decision making process. Mythical is referred to as an unverifiable, unfounded notion that is a popular belief existing in only the imagination.
2. Can professional educators and government officials have confidence that *opinionated knowledge* is true?
3. Can one have confidence in whatever method was used as a basis to classify a country as authentic?
4. Are professional educators and government leaders inclined to base their opinions on only mythical knowledge, or empirical knowledge, or both?

The second problem is one of perceptions from the people in so-called third world countries. How does a society from a purported third world nation view those who "judge" or characterize or personalize them into one of their seemed derogatory categories? De Souza (1974) in his attempt to describe the word "Developing" alludes to the question, "...can the words used to describe other countries of the world disturb the feelings of citizens that hear their countries called 'undeveloped,' let alone 'backward' or 'primitive'?" If feelings are disturbed, then,

1. Do people within the "judged" society feel that their pride, dignity and integrity are being jeopardized?
2. If these terms can be considered derogatory, then are so-called developed societies in a subtle way passing judgement upon another society?

Perhaps wider spheres of thought would result if professional educators and public officials would make attempts to better understand and appreciate the similarities among well-established "first world" nations and those nations who are in the process of establishing their economic and political infrastructure. If a better understanding of similarities were to occur,

1. "Are today's educators transmitting to students what they have come to know about the rich heritage of other races and societies around the world?"
2. Or, "Are educators teaching the next generation to judge other societies by using derogatory adjectives that portray subtle negativism, bias or judgmental undertones?"
3. Why do public officials and educators in carrying out their duties and responsibilities, perpetuate using these adjectives?

Seers (1972) in his plea for a definition of development based on human well-being asked "Why do we confuse development with economic growth? He cited works that showed that during the United Nations' "Development Decade" (the 1960s) "the growth of economic inequality and unemployment may actually have accelerated. Seers further stated that "One cannot really say that there has been development for the world as a whole when the benefits of technical progress have served minorities which were already rich." If Seers postulation is true,