You Be The Judge!

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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 poor 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 "undeveloped" 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 and need to be debated:

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?

Purpose and Educational Importance

The purpose of this paper and its educational importance is to cause educators and public officials to think and debate about their using so-called derogatory adjectives that purportedly portrays judgment and negativism upon other societies. To debate these questions properly, varying points of view are needed to impede stereotypical conclusions. The debate should seek to know what is true and what is not. The author poses these questions to begin the debate:

1. What is a so-called developed nation?
2. When specifically does a country qualify to be considered a "developed," or "first world" nation?
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?
4. 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."
5. Would the world traders or politicians or educators view a nation differently if the adjective were to be deleted that describes its economic or political orientation?
6. Can nations retain the basic elements of their cultures and still be acknowledged as an equal within the world community of nations?
7. Can nations sustain their individuality and character and still enter into the age of science and technology?
8. Are professional educators and government leaders inclined to base their opinions on only mythical knowledge, or empirical knowledge, or both?
9. Do people within the "judged" society feel that their pride, dignity and integrity are being jeopardized?
10. If these terms can be considered derogatory, then are so-called developed societies in a subtle way passing judgment upon another society?
11. 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?
12. Or, are educators teaching the next generation to judge other societies by using derogatory adjectives that portray subtle negativism, bias, or judgmental undertones?
13. Why do public officials and educators, in carrying out their duties and responsibilities, perpetuate using these adjectives?