

Streeten, Paul and Shahid Burki (1978). "Basic Needs: Some Issues". World Development 6: 411-21.

In this article, Streeten and Burki attempt to demonstrate the need for a development strategy aimed at basic needs, and outline the main elements of such a strategy. They clarify some of the conceptual and operational issues involved, provide a glimpse at the magnitude of the deprivation endured by the world's poor, and examine the limitations of traditional approaches. Lastly, the authors sketch the course that future research should take in fleshing out the concept of basic needs.

Streeten and Burki begin their article by noting that "in spite of unprecedentedly and unexpectedly high growth rates during the last twenty-five years, . . . aggregate economic growth appears to have done very little for the poorer half of the Third World's rapidly growing populations". This has led, say the authors, "to an emphasis on employment . . . (and) inequality in the distribution of income and wealth", a change they welcome (p. 411). "The evolution, from growth as the principal performance antenna . . . to basic needs", contend Streeten and Burki, "is an evolution from abstract to concrete objectives, from a preoccupation with means to a renewed awareness of ends" (p. 412).

The notion of basic needs, the authors realize, is conceptually difficult, as it is plagued by "variations in standards, differences in social objectives and the problems that arise in ranking basic goods and services" (p. 413). Nonetheless, argue Streeten and Burki, it is possible to outline the key features of a basic needs strategy. It is, they say, an approach which (1) "gives high priority to meeting the needs of poorest people" (p. 413); (2) "stresses the importance of efforts to redress absolute deprivation";

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(3) "emphasizes supply management"; (4) "implies a substantial role for the government", and "can be defined fairly broadly so as to comprise 'material' as well as 'non-material' needs" (p. 414). But still to be thought through, concede Streeten and Burki, are a number of "operational issues". Among these are such matters as the "domestic and external resources required for meeting the basic needs of a very large and growing number of people in developing countries", the "designing of public services so that they benefit the poor", and the "trade-off between basic needs and other objectives" (p. 415).

The magnitude of suffering among the world's poor, Streeten and Burki realize, is staggering. They estimate that of the 1.2 billion people in the poorest countries, 50 percent are undernourished, 67 percent do not have access to drinking water, and 42 percent have less than satisfactory shelter.

Academics, they say, can help in alleviating these deprivations by adding "operation content" to the concept of basic needs. To achieve this, conclude Streeten and Burki, research should focus increasingly on: (1) "countries in which basic needs of a large population are unsatisfied" (p. 419); (2) "countries that have given high priority to basic needs"; and (3) "countries that are, after a revolution or war, embarking on development, and may therefore be open to new ideas and welcome cooperation in conducting basic needs studies and implementing basic needs policies" (p. 420).

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