

CHAPTER I

A STRATEGIC INVESTMENT

We must prepare the field for the cooperation of all the cultures of the world where all will give and take from each other. This is the keynote of the coming age.

Rabindranath Tagore

Profound changes are taking place throughout the world. When these changes are assessed, what are we to conclude? Are we to conclude that the world is much the same as it was twenty, thirty or fifty years ago? Or are we to conclude that a new world order is emerging - a world order which assigns a much higher priority to cultural relations in national and international development?

The claim that cultural relations have a crucial role to play in the unfolding world order is not limited to isolated individuals or particular countries. Indeed, it is being advocated by prominent people the world over - politicians, statesmen, corporate executives, scientists, scholars, artists, humanists and philosophers. Moreover, it is being voiced in every quarter of the globe - from North America and Europe to Asia, Africa, Australia and Latin America. As such, it is part and parcel of a universal movement for a more just and humane world.

The Ascendency of Cultural Relations

Immediately following World War II, international interest was focused on rebuilding devastated economic systems. What started out as an interest in the forties became a fetish in the fifties and sixties. During this period, efforts were directed almost exclusively to increasing economic wealth and the material dimension of development. The world was sub-divided into "developed" and "developing" components according to the size of a country's gross national product or the level of its per capita income. Towards the end of the sixties, a strong reaction against this exclusive materialistic orientation set in. It was precipitated by a number of factors, such as the resistance of many Third World countries to this one-sided view of development, the environmental crisis, the educational revolution, the rebellion of the younger generation, the escalating interest in leisure-time activities and the burgeoning concern for more universal contact on a cultural and human level.

It was out of this reaction that the quest for a better quality of life was born. It brought with it a new sense of enlightenment about the real nature of human needs and the process of development. It is true that some of the most basic needs are economic. But there are basic social, political, cultural and spiritual needs as well. Increasingly, it is recognized that the lack of creative stimulation, satisfaction in the work place, social bonds, religious beliefs, moral values, political rights and identity can cause mental and physical problems which are every bit as serious as the problems caused by shortages of the material necessities of life. Perhaps this is what prompted the World Employment Conference of the International Labour Organization to define basic needs as "the satisfaction of a certain minimum of private family needs - food, reasonable housing and clothing - as well as certain household goods and essential public services, such as drinking water, public transportation, sanitary services, health facilities, possibilities