

Towards the Sustainable Development of Tibet

By

Sehlaré Makgetlaneng

Sehlaré Makgetlaneng, PhD
Chief Research Specialist
Programme Leader: Governance and Security
Africa Institute of South Africa
Human Sciences Research Council
Pretoria 0002
SOUTH AFRICA
E-mails: smakgetlaneng@hsrc.ac.za;
sehlarengaka@gmail.com

We are meeting here in Lhasa, the capital of the Autonomous Region of Tibet as intellectuals to discuss opportunities and challenges enjoyed and faced by the People's Republic of China in the struggle for the development of Tibet. This invitation by the State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, through its Director-General, Lu Guangjin, to the Fourth Forum on the Development of Tibet, China is highly appreciated. It provides us with the opportunity not only to present and share our views as intellectuals on the theme of the Fourth Forum on the Development of Tibet, "Opportunities and Challenges for the Development of Tibet," but also with the opportunity to see Tibet and its people. Edward Said, who best and effectively represented the people of Palestine as an intellectual doing research and lecturing at the universities in the United States of America until he passed away on 25 September 2003 and, as an independent member of the Palestinian National Council from 1977 to 1991, articulated opportunities and challenges enjoyed and faced by intellectuals in representing the people in the strategic area of development. According to Robert Fisk, he was "the most powerful political voice" for Palestinian people.¹ In his Reith Lectures of 1993 published as a book, *Representations of the Intellectual*, Said defines the intellectual as:

an individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public. And this role has an edge to it, and cannot be played without a sense of being someone whose place it is publicly to raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than to produce them), to be someone who cannot easily be co-opted by governments or corporations, and whose *raison d'être* is to represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug. The intellectual does so on the basis of universal principles: that all human beings are entitled to expect decent standards of behaviour concerning freedom and justice from worldly powers or nations, and that deliberate or inadvertent violations of these standards need to be tested and fought against courageously.²

Said points out further that

In the end it is the intellectual as a representative figure that matters - someone who visibly represents a standpoint of some kind, and someone who makes articulate representations to his or her public despite all sorts of barriers. My argument is that intellectuals are individuals with a vocation for the art of representing, whether that is talking, writing, teaching, appearing on television. And that vocation is important to the extent that it is publicly recognizable and involves both commitment and risk, boldness and vulnerability.³

Said is articulating the universality of intellectuals and the particularity within this universality. They have independence as producers and disseminators of knowledge on national and international relations and cooperation and domestic and foreign policies of countries on the global scale and as social agents through presentations of their papers at conferences or forums, their books, journal articles, monographs, policy briefs, interviews and other means as actors dominating the possession of human or intellectual capital to speak on behalf of those their works structurally represent. Their structural commitment to speak on behalf of particular social forces through their works is central in their universality which is that no organisation and social force can achieve and sustain its strategic objectives without the organic input of intellectuals. It is for this reason that:

In dark times, an intellectual is very often looked to by members of his or her nationality to represent, speak out for, and testify to the suffering of that nationality ... To this terribly important task of representing the collective suffering of your own people, testifying to its travails, reasserting its enduring presence, reinforcing its memory, there must be added something else, which only an intellectual, I believe, has the obligation to fulfil. After all, many novelists, painters, and poets, like Manzoni, Picasso, or Neruda, have embodied the historical experience of their people in aesthetic works, which in turn become recognized as great masterpieces. For the intellectual the task, I believe is explicitly to universalize the crisis, to give greater human scope so to what a particular race or nation suffered, to associate that experience with the suffering of others ... This does not at all mean a loss in historical specificity, but rather it guards against the possibility that a lesson learned about oppression in one place will be forgotten or violated in another place or time.⁴

Central to Said's position is that intellectuals are the dominant actors in the production and dissemination of knowledge vital to development of the world and its people. They are dominant in the development of knowledge humanity requires to understand the present situation it is confronting for its sustainable development. The task of the development of knowledge is not purely an academic task. It is a task specified by practice of those who use knowledge in achieving particular developmental objectives. By producing and disseminating knowledge vital to human development, intellectuals provide the humanity with power it organises in achieving its objectives.

The structural responsibility and the form and content of the task executed by intellectuals are such that intellectuals represent not only members of their race, nation, language, ethnicity, religion, culture, and location and other related socio-historical processes in the area of development. This reality is supported by the BRICS Think Tank Council in its recommendations to BRICS heads of state and government at their Sixth Summit held from 14 to 16 July 2014 in Fortaleza and Brasilia in Brazil. It recommended that political leaders of BRICS members should, among others, guard against environmental threats to sustainable development, improve living conditions, reduce inequalities, create employment opportunities, eradicate extreme poverty and prioritise health and education in their countries.⁵ The concerted, practical efforts in improving living conditions, creating employment opportunities, eradicating poverty and combating inequalities through equitable distribution of resources including in the areas of health and education is critical in ensuring the movement towards the sustainable development. Equitable distribution of resources is critical in fostering the sustainable inclusive economic growth which in turn is prerequisite to the sustainable development and progress. The fact that the People's Republic of China is a member of BRICS and that Tibet is an integral part of China means that intellectuals of Brazil, Russia, India and South Africa not only of China recommended that China should act upon these recommendations relating also to the people of Tibet irrespective of their language, ethnicity, religion, culture, and location. The theme of the 6th BRICS Summit, Inclusive Growth: Sustainable Solutions, applies also to the people of Tibet. The point is that the movement towards their sustainable development requires inclusive growth and sustainable solutions for it to be achieved and sustained. The theme was chosen in "keeping" with "the imperative to address challenges to humankind posed by the need to simultaneously achieve growth, inclusiveness, protection and preservation."⁶ The Fortaleza Declaration and Action Plan adopted at the 6th Summit of Heads of State and Government of BRICS applies also to the people of Tibet. The recommendations of the BRICS Think Tank Council to BRICS heads of state and government at their Sixth Summit were recognised by political leaders of BRICS members in the Fortaleza Declaration and Action Plan. Of specific or particular relevance to the people of Tibet is its point twenty-six as stated by BRICS political leaders that:

development and security are closely interlinked, mutually reinforcing and key to attaining sustainable peace. We reiterate our view that the establishment of sustainable peace requires a comprehensive, concerted and determined approach, based on mutual trust, mutual benefit, equity and cooperation, which address the root causes of conflicts, including their political, economic and social dimensions.⁷

Its point twenty-seven is also of specific or particular relevance to the people of Tibet. BRICS political leaders state it when they maintain that they:

will continue our joint efforts in coordinating positions and on shared interests on global peace and security issues for the common well-being of humanity. We stress our commitment to the sustainable and peaceful settlement of disputes, according to the principles and purposes of the UN Charter. We condemn

unilateral military interventions and economic sanctions in violation of international law and universally recognized norms of international relations. Bearing this in mind, we emphasize the unique importance of the indivisible nature of security, and that no state should strengthen its security at the expense of the security of others.⁸

BRICS heads of state and government are here articulating their commitment towards peace and security not only globally, but also nationally within countries in which they have power and authority to ensure the provision and defence of the sustainable peace and security.

They articulate their commitment towards the treatment of all human rights on equal and fair basis in the point twenty-eight of the Fortaleza Declaration and Action Plan when they point out that they:

agree to continue to treat all human rights, including the right to development, in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing and with the same emphasis. We will foster dialogue and cooperation on the basis of equality and mutual respect in the field of human rights, both within BRICS and in multilateral fora – including the United Nations Human Rights Council where all BRICS serve as members in 2014 – taking into account the necessity to promote, protect and fulfil human rights in a non-selective, non-politicized and constructive manner, and without double standards.⁹

We sincerely hope that political leaders of China in the provision of direction of their country in its internal relations will substantiate in practice points of the Fortaleza Declaration and Action Plan particularly those most tangibly applying to the people of Tibet in the movement towards the sustainable development of their autonomous region. We sincerely hope that leaders of other BRICS countries will continue working with them in making expansion of the achievement of “the overarching objectives of peace, security, development and cooperation” which have been guiding BRICS since its inception.¹⁰ The commitment to these objectives is of vital importance to the partnership not only of political leaders of BRICS countries, but also to the people of these countries. Our sincere hope on this issue is based on the declared position of the leaders of BRICS countries that:

In this new cycle, while remaining committed to those objectives, we pledge to deepen our partnership with a renewed vision, based on openness, inclusiveness and mutually beneficial cooperation. In this sense, we are ready to explore new areas towards a comprehensive cooperation and a closer economic partnership to facilitate market inter-linkages, financial integration, infrastructural connectivity as well as people-to-people contacts.¹¹

The Fourth Forum on the Development of Tibet, China is an example of these “people-to-people contacts.”

This presentation is informed by the thesis of the one China policy. Central to this thesis is the position in relation to Tibet that Tibet is a component part of the People's Republic of China. In recognising this policy, Samuel P. Huntington maintains that Tibet is an integral part of the People's Republic of China with "considerable autonomy" in which the Chinese do not constitute the majority of the population.¹² The People's Republic of China is a multi-ethnic country consisting of fifty-six ethnic groups. It is a heterogeneous social formation not only in terms of ethnicity, but also of culture and religion. One should be careful in providing analysis of the movement towards the sustainable development of the social formations which are ethnic, cultural and religious heterogeneous such as the People's Republic of China. China is a social formation whose nationality transcends ethnic, cultural and religious differences. To do justice to the movement towards the sustainable development of Tibet one has to point out, among others, that the discourse on ethnicity very often denies the reality of the socio-political and economic commonality of interests and common patterns of cooperation among individuals of different ethnic groups particularly those who are members of one nation and camouflages or hides the existence of antagonistic and different interests and patterns of cooperation among members of one ethnic group including those who are not members of one nation.

Any effort towards the sustainable development of Tibet should aim, among others, at the creation of the sustainable legitimacy among the people of Tibet. Central to this aim should be the empowerment of the people of Tibet for them to serve as the social agents of their sustainable development and progress. This means, among others, that the people of Tibet should not be superseded as social agents of the development and progress of Tibet. The sustenance of autonomous governance structures committed to the achievement of the sustainable development of Tibet is of vital importance in ensuring the accountability to the people of Tibet. The point is that the sustainable legitimacy is supportive of the movement towards the sustainable development of Tibet. The lack of legitimacy among the people of Tibet may provoke opposition and be an obstacle to the movement towards their sustainable development.

The requisite institutional support by the central government of the People's Republic of China to the people of Tibet in their movement towards the sustainable development of their autonomous region is the central in their socio-economic, cultural and religious development. This institutional support should have as its foundation the necessary deployment of resources to Tibet and their equitable access by the people of the region. The equitable access to the resources by the people of Tibet is directly linked to the issue of the substantial improvement of the quality of their life. This institutional responsibility to the people of the region by the central government of China is critical to ensure the creation of the sustainable solidarity and unity among the people of Tibet of various ethnic groups. Tibet is divided into ethnic groups. The relationship between Tibet's ethnic groups should be managed to reduce and eliminate socio-economic tensions and conflicts among them inherent in the process of development. Ethnic tensions are structurally against solidarity and unity which is necessary to enhance socio-political and economic cohesion among the people of Tibet.

The advancement of collective and individual peace, security and freedom, basic human needs and socio-economic justice should not be based on the ethnic affiliation. The movement towards the sustainable development should be at the centre of the struggle against viewing the situation of Tibet primarily through ethnicity. The point is that in the advancement of the sustainable development of Tibet, its people should be viewed as individuals who are nationals of China not as individuals who belong to the particular ethnic groups. The fact that citizens of Tibet should be treated as citizens of China not as members of particular ethnic groups is critical in the advancement of the structural change and transformation of Tibet and its people. The success of its structural change and transformation is the process based on the provision of its people with peace, security and freedom, basic human needs and socio-economic justice. This provision should take into account the issue of uneven or unequal development of the people of Tibet so as to ensure the equitable distribution of resources among them.

The People's Republic of China is advancing development in Tibet primarily by transforming it into a modern social formation as its integral part. It has initiated infrastructural projects such as factories and housing. The ethnic composition of Tibet has been transformed, among others, through tourism and migration.

Cultural and Religious Rights and the Socio-Economic Rights of the People of Tibet

The struggle for the cultural and religious rights of the people of Tibet may be the struggle for their socio-economic rights. For the people of Tibet, the struggle for cultural and religious rights and the struggle for socio-economic rights may be inseparable if not dialectically and organically interlinked.

The demand for more cultural and religious rights may lead to more socio-economic rights of the people of Tibet. Cultural and religious rights and socio-economic rights shape and develop in relation to one another. Cultural and religious rights of the people of Tibet should be viewed as processes dialectically and organically interlinked with their socio-economic rights. The role of the state of the People's Republic of China is not only that of progressively defending the cultural and religious rights of the people of Tibet, but also of transforming their culture and religion to serve their socio-economic development. In other words, its responsibility as the social organ committed to the sustainable development of the people of China is to ensure that the culture and religion of the people of Tibet are not obstacles to the popular socio-economic change and transformation of Tibet. The movement towards the sustainable development of Tibet is best and effectively served by its popular cultural and religious change and transformation.

The process of cultural and religious change and transformation as an integral part of facilitating the movement towards the sustainable development of Tibet should take into account the fact that people are against control over their lives not only socially and economically, but also culturally and religiously as well as in terms of their ecological and environmental setting. When it comes to some ethnic groups characterised by low level of development compared to other ethnic groups in countries which have power and authority on the global scale, power and authority which threaten interests of some

countries, this opposition is very often used by some external actors particularly in the name of solidarity and unity with the ethnic groups in question for their own interests. These interests of external actors have nothing to do with those of the ethnic groups in question. It is for this reason in particular that the process of cultural and religious change and transformation as an integral part of facilitating the movement towards the sustainable development of Tibet should be correctly handled to ensure that it is supported by the people of Tibet. This is critical for the external actors hostile to the People's Republic of China not to be provided with the means to interfere in the internal affairs of Tibet in the name of acting in solidarity and unity with the people of Tibet while in fact they use them for their own interests.

The Law of Uneven or Unequal Development and the Movement towards the Sustainable Development of Tibet

Tibet is more lacking in terms of development than other parts of China. It is a structural victim of the law of uneven or unequal development. Development is not a uniform or homogeneous process. As a process taking place under different socio-historical circumstances and conditions, development is heterogeneous in form and content. Development of integral part of China is uneven or unequal. Tibet is not an exception to this law of uneven or unequal development. The application of the socialist market economic system by the People's Republic of China will continue having positive impact on the movement towards the sustainable development of Tibet. Relations between ethnic groups in Tibet should be managed in order to ensure that it do not negatively impact on the efforts to achieve the sustainable development of Tibet. Tibet as the most unequal part of the People's Republic of China, the state of the People's Republic of China should substantially increase its distribution of resources and the flow of products, goods and services to Tibet as a means to increase its contribution towards the achievement of its sustainable development.

The movement towards the sustainable development in any country is successful provided people are placed at the centre of development in terms of economic policy, debate and advocacy. This is the contribution of Mahbub ul Haq, the economist of Pakistan, towards the first Human Development Report 1990 of the United Nations Development Programme. Writing in its introduction, he pointed out that:

People are the real wealth of a nation. The basic objective of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, health and creative lives. This may appear to be a simple truth. But it is often forgotten in the immediate concern with the accumulation of commodities and financial wealth.¹³

He emphasises the fact that development is about the people in his explanation of the purpose of Human Development Report 1990 of the United Nations Development Programme by maintaining that:

This Report is about people – and about how development enlarges their choices. It is about more than GNP growth, more than income and wealth and more about

producing commodities and accumulating capital. A person's access to income may be one of the choices, but it is not the sum total of human endeavor.

Human development is a process of enlarging people's choices. The most critical of these wide-ranging choices are to live a long and healthy life, to be educated and to have access to resources needed for a decent standard of living. Additional choices include political freedom, guaranteed human rights and personal self-respect.

Development enables people to have these choices. No one can guarantee human happiness, and the choices people make are their own concern. But the process of development should at least create a conducive environment for people, individually and collectively, to develop their full potential and to have a reasonable chance of leading productive and creative lives in accord with their needs and interests.

Human development thus concerns more than the formation of human capabilities, such as improved health or knowledge. It also concerns the use of these capabilities, be it for work, leisure or political and cultural activities. And if the scales of human development fail to balance the formation and use of human capabilities, much human potential will be frustrated.¹⁴

This comprehensive view of development which goes beyond its economic aspects is the social, political, economic, human resources development, cultural, religious and technological process by the people themselves for themselves as social agents creating, expanding and sustaining choices which are essential for their sustainable development.

The determination of the People's Republic of China in its struggle for sustainable development of Tibet and its people basing its actions on the concrete analysis of the concrete situation of Tibet, honest and sincere about challenges it faces and opportunities it enjoys is one of the key requirements for the achievement of sustainable development of Tibet. How best and effectively to fulfill the requirements of this struggle for it to be successful in achieving sustainable development of the people of Tibet is provided for by Amilcar Cabral in his advice that we should:

Always bear in mind that the people are not fighting for ideas, for the things in anyone's head. They are fighting to win material benefits, to live better and in peace, to see their lives go forward, to guarantee the future of their children.¹⁵

The movement towards the sustainable development and the achievement of this development process are some of the key challenges faced on the global scale. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development or the World Bank in its 1992 report maintains this position when it points out: "The achievement of sustainable and equitable development remains the greatest challenge facing the human race." It continues maintaining that:

Despite good progress over the past generation, more than 1 billion people still live in acute poverty and suffer grossly inadequate access to the resources – education, health services, infrastructure, land, and credit – required

to give them a chance for a better life. The essential task of development is to provide opportunities so that these people, and the hundreds of millions not much better off, can reach their potential.¹⁶

To seriously expect the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development or the World Bank to deliberately contribute towards the achievement of sustainable and equitable development is to expect it to adopt and implement conscious decisions to wage the struggle to end its existence.

By inviting us to the Fourth Forum on the Development of Tibet, China, the State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China provided us with the practical opportunity to have new data on the development of Tibet and its people with which we tested what has been said by individuals with different and antagonistic positions about the development of Tibet. We wish the people of Tibet under the national leadership of the People's Republic of China success in their cause to achieve their strategic objective of the sustainable social, political, economic, cultural, human capital or human resources development, religious and technological development.

Notes and References

- ¹ Robert Fisk, "Why bombing Ashkelon is the most tragic irony," *The Independent*, 30 December 2008.
- ² Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, London: Vintage, 1994, pp. 11-2.
- ³ *Ibid.*, p. 12-3.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 43-4
- ⁵ Olive Shisana, *Reporting on the Sixth BRICS Summit*, Chair of the South African BRICS Think Tank on behalf of the South African BRICS Think Tank, HSRC/BRICS Seminar, Pretoria, Cape Town and Durban, South Africa, 29 July 2014.
- ⁶ BRICS, *Sixth Summit: Fortaleza Declaration and Action Plan of the Heads of State and Government of BRICS*, <http://brics6.itamaraty.gov.br/category-english/21-documents/223-sixth-summit-declaration-and-action-plan>, page 1 of 11 [Accessed 30 July 2014].
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, page 4 of 11.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, page 1 of 11.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*
- ¹² Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Making of World Order*, New York: Touchstone Books, 1996, p. 168.
- ¹³ Mahbub ul Haq, quoted in *Human Development Report 1990*, United Nations Development Programme, New York: Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 9.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1.
- ¹⁵ Amilcar Cabral, *Revolution in Guinea: Selected Texts* by Amilcar Cabral, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969, p.

¹⁶ International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank), World Development Report 1992: Development and the Environment, New York: Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 1.