



walls to safeguard humanitarian action.

Third, NGOs need to seek dialogue with senior civilian leaders in the executive branch, as well as Congress, who provide the mandate and the money for these expanded U.S. military roles. In the first instance, this dialogue should enhance awareness of the humanitarian implications of new doctrine and new types of military deployments with a view to modifying or clarifying the directives given to the military leadership. This dialogue should be informed by more objective research to examine assumptions about expected political dividends arising from U.S. military engagement in assistance activities, and whether the benefits outweigh the costs, including their net effect on impartial humanitarian actors and the civilian populations they seek to assist.

Finally, the NGO community itself, starting with the major operational international agencies, requires an urgent process of internal reflection on its own adherence to humanitarian principles in the context of these developments. NGO leaders need to ask themselves hard questions about whether the drive for ever-expanding budgets has undermined their ability to adhere to humanitarian principles and what the costs of a pragmatic approach have actually been. Efforts in this direction, organized by the Norwegian Refugee Council, for example, are already under way. Links with research institutions such as the Humanitarian Policy Group and the Feinstein International Center at Tufts University will be critical in making an objective assessment and planning for a future of continued operational complexity. 

*This article originally appeared in the January 2013 issue of Humanitarian Exchange Magazine, a publication of the Humanitarian Practice Network (HPN). The Guidelines for Relations Between U.S. Armed Forces and Non-Governmental Humanitarian Organizations in Hostile or Potentially Hostile Environments are available at <http://www.interaction.org/document/interaction-us-civilian-military-guidelines-july-2007>.*

# The Tallest Man in the World

► **How to see beyond the cultural differences that complicate development.**

By **Eric Meade**, Vice President and Senior Futurist, Institute for Alternative Futures



**I**N 1967, Dr. Bill Foege was traveling through West Africa vaccinating the locals against smallpox. At 6' 7" tall, he must have been a sight to see. As he recounts in his memoir *House on Fire: The Fight to Eradicate Smallpox*, one day he visited a Nigerian village to meet with the chief to set up a time to vaccinate the villagers. To Dr. Foege's surprise, the chief suggested that they do the vaccinations right then. Dr. Foege protested that everyone was out working in the fields, but the chief sent a message through a talking drum that induced several thousand people to come and be vaccinated over the next several hours. At the end of the day, Dr. Foege asked the chief how he had managed to bring so many people in from the fields. What message had he sent through

the talking drum? The chief replied, "I told them to come to the market if they wanted to see the tallest man in the world."

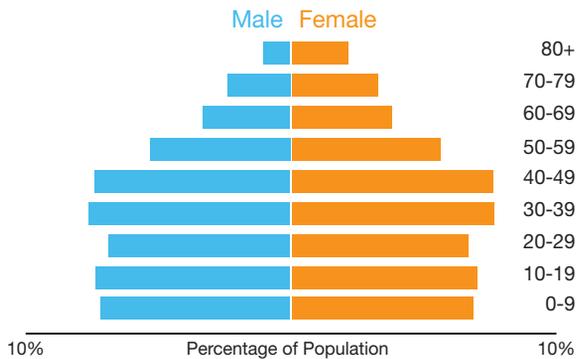
Such anecdotes are common in development work and produce anything from laughter to discomfort on the part of development practitioners. The easiest response is to dismiss the villagers' curious behavior—coming to the market not for a life-saving vaccine but for the novelty of seeing a tall white man—as a “cultural difference” that we are in no position to judge. But what is behind this so-called “cultural difference” and other “cultural

**It is naïve to think that development work can change the systems within which people live without also changing the people themselves.**

differences” that can make development work so challenging? And can development practitioners become more effective by understanding them?

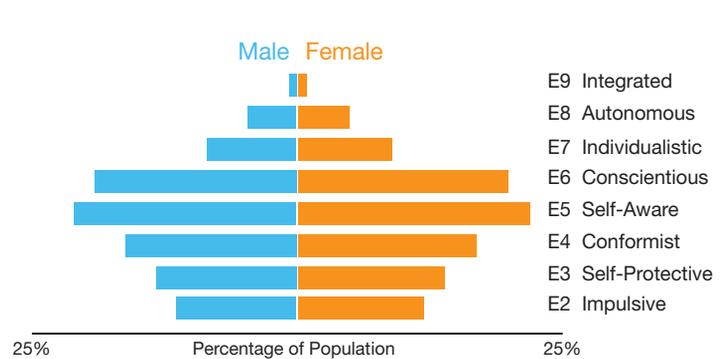
Before answering these questions, one must first differentiate between the *objective* side and the *subjective* side of development. The objective side deals with improving the systems in which people live, like strengthening governance institutions, making markets more inclusive and building better schools. Culture resides on the subjective side, which is more elusive since it deals with how people see themselves and the world around them. Measuring the subjective side is more difficult, and even talking about it makes many people uncomfortable if it implies making value judgments about the attitudes and beliefs of others. How-

U.S. Age Structure (2000)



Source: UN Demographic Yearbook, 2009-2010

Notional U.S. Ego Demographics



Note: For illustrative purposes only

ever, it is naïve to think that development work can change the systems within which people live without also changing the people themselves. Efforts to do so fall far short of their potential, wasting money and talent on system improvements that are often corrupted, ignored or otherwise undermined soon after the work is complete.

So where does culture come from? One part comes from the shared experiences of a community’s past, within the uniqueness of the surrounding environment. Another part comes from patterns of attitudes and behaviors that exist at an individual level. For this reason, to understand culture, one must also understand how individu-

**To understand culture, one must also understand how individuals across all cultures see themselves and the world around them.**

als across all cultures see themselves and the world around them. Psychology has explored this question for more than a century. One of the useful tools it has produced is Jane Loevinger’s model of ego development, which describes the eight stages through which an individual’s “ego”—that is, what he or she is referring to when saying the word “I”—develops as the individual grows through life. Here

are the eight stages of this developmental sequence, excerpted from Hy and Loevinger’s *Measuring Ego Development*:

**Impulsive:** Focused on “physical needs and impulses, dependent on others for control. There is little sense of causation. Rules are poorly understood.”

**Self-Protective:** Driven by “more or less opportunistic hedonism; they lack long-term goals and ideals. They want immediate gratification and, if they can, will exploit others for their ends.”

**Conformist:** “Rules are accepted just because they are the rules ... There is a right way and a wrong way, and it is the same for everybody all the time, or at least for broad classes of people described in demographic terms.”

**Self-Aware:** “The person has become aware that not everyone, including his or her own self, conforms perfectly all the time to the characteristics that stereotypes seem to demand.”

**Conscientious:** “... recognition of multiple possibilities in situations leads to a sense of choice; decisions are made for reasons. The person strives for goals, tries to live up to ideals, and to improve the self.”

**Individualistic:** “There is a greater tolerance for individual differences ... Another new element is a concept of people as having and being different in different roles.”

**Autonomous:** “... recognition of other people’s need for autonomy ... a deepened respect for other people and their need to find their own way and even make their

own mistakes.”

**Integrated:** Since few people reach this stage, Loevinger relied on Abraham Maslow’s description of the “self-actualizing person” in his well-known hierarchy of needs.

Loevinger’s model provides a new lens for thinking about—and differentiating—the individual attitudes and behaviors that together make up a “culture.” For example, consider how Iranians at different ego stages would perceive the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Someone at the “impulsive” stage may see him as a respected elder, perhaps even with magical powers. Someone at the “conformist” stage, where “we-they” distinctions are strong, may appreciate Ahmadinejad’s assertion of Iranian national power. Someone at the “conscientious” stage may dislike how Ahmadinejad’s nationalistic posturing discourages foreign direct investment. Someone at the “autonomous” stage may be adroit in navigating the Iranian regime while simultaneously creating the conditions for reform. Thus, the ability of Ahmadinejad to retain power depends not only on his own policies and actions but also on the make-up of the Iranian population with respect to Loevinger’s stages of ego development.

The technical term for this make-up is “ego demographics,” which refers to the proportion of a population at each stage of Loevinger’s model. Ego demographics are similar to a country’s age structure, except that each segment represents a stage of ego development rather than an interval

of biological age (see figure). As with age, it is important to note that multiple stages will be represented within a given population. Loevinger's model is universal and speaks to the potential that all humans—regardless of ethnic and national distinctions—have in common. Ego demographics deals only with the *proportion* at each stage, which will vary based on two factors:

Since ego development is to some extent a function of biological age (that is, it occurs as individuals go through life), differences in age structure alone will likely yield differences in ego demographics.

Since ego development is to some extent shaped by the conditions under which a person lives, one would expect a population's ego demographics to be shifted toward the lower stages in environments where poverty, conflict, disease and repression are prevalent.

Both of these factors would suggest that the ego demographics of the village vis-

### **This application of a psychological model to specific communities will make some people uncomfortable.**

ited by Dr. Foege would have been skewed toward the earlier states of Loevinger's model. According to the UN's *Demographic Yearbook* for 1967, more than half of the rural population in Nigeria was under the age of 20. Environmental stresses like poverty and disease were widespread, even before the civil war that started that year. Thus, it makes sense that the behavior of these villagers—coming to the market not for a lifesaving vaccine but for the novelty of seeing a tall white man—lines up so well with what one might expect from the first two ego stages, “impulsive” and “self-protective.” At these stages, people are unable

to weigh the future risks and benefits of alternative courses of action (e.g., getting vaccinated vs. not getting vaccinated). At the same time, they respect their elders (e.g., the village chief) and they admire physical prowess (e.g., Foege's height). With ego demographics in mind, this situation suddenly makes sense and could even have been anticipated.

This application of a psychological model to specific communities will make some people uncomfortable. However, applying the model is not the same as passing judgment on anyone as being “worse” or “less than” anyone else. Loevinger's ego stages are common to *all* humans. Everyone has potential to cross from one ego stage to another; however in some environments that potential is more difficult to actualize. It has nothing to do with ethnicity or nationality. All societies include people from a wide range of ego stages; and those at higher stages typically have more in



**M.S. in International Health Policy and Management**

Graduate Programs in Sustainable International Development

**Knowledge Advancing Social Justice**

<http://heller.brandeis.edu>  
 HellerAdmissions@Brandeis.edu  
 Phone: 781-736-3820

**Brandeis University**  
 THE HELLER SCHOOL FOR SOCIAL  
 POLICY AND MANAGEMENT

### Ego demographics in the poverty literature

The poverty literature offers plentiful examples of how ego demographics show up in the real world. For example, in his highly influential book *The Unheavenly City*, American political scientist Edward Banfield described the four classes of American society in terms that map readily to Loevinger's model (see table). The self-expression and service ethic of the upper class correspond to Loevinger's "individualistic" stage and above, the achievement orientation of the middle class to the "conscientious" stage, the conformity of the working class to the "conformist" stage, and the impulsiveness and aggression of the lower class to the "impulsive" and "self-protective" stages. This is not to suggest that all members of that class are at the correlating ego stages, but rather that the predominant ego stages shape the culture of the group and persist across generations.

### American Class Descriptions

### Ego Stage Descriptions

<b>UPPER</b>	<p>"places great value on ... 'developing one's potentialities to the full' ... is mindful of the rights of others and wants issues to be settled on their merits and by rational discussion, ... deplores bigotry"</p>	<p><b>Integrated</b> – "Maslow's 'self-actualizing person'"</p> <p><b>Autonomous</b> – "recognition of other people's need for autonomy ... a deepened respect for other people and their need to find their own way and even make their own mistakes"</p> <p><b>Individualistic</b> – "There is a greater tolerance for individual differences ... Another new element is a concept of people as having and being different in different roles."</p>
<b>MIDDLE</b>	<p>"wants their children to go to college and to acquire the kind of formal training that will help them 'get ahead' ... has regard for the rights of others ... deplores bigotry and abhors violence [but] does not ... hold these attitudes as strongly as do members of the upper class."</p>	<p><b>Conscientious</b> – "... recognition of multiple possibilities in situations leads to a sense of choice; decisions are made for reasons. The person strives for goals, tries to live up to ideals, and to improve the self."</p> <p><b>Self-aware</b> – "The person has become aware that not everyone, including his or her own self, conforms perfectly all the time to the characteristics that stereotypes seem to demand."</p>
<b>WORKING</b>	<p>"emphasizes the virtues of neatness and cleanliness, honesty, obedience and respect for external authority ... it does not seem to occur to him that he is entitled to form opinions of his own ..."</p>	<p><b>Conformist</b> – "Rules are accepted just because they are the rules ... There is a right way and a wrong way, and it is the same for everybody all the time, or at least for broad classes of people described in demographic terms."</p>
<b>LOWER</b>	<p>"lives from moment to moment ... [sees the future as] something fixed, fated, beyond his control. Impulse governs his behavior ... [He] has a feeble, attenuated sense of self ... he is suspicious and hostile, aggressive yet dependent."</p>	<p><b>Self-protective</b> – "... more or less opportunistic hedonism; they lack long-term goals and ideals. They want immediate gratification and, if they can, will exploit others for their ends."</p> <p><b>Impulsive</b> – "... physical needs and impulses, dependent on others for control. There is little sense of causation. Rules are poorly understood."</p>

common with their counterparts in other societies than they do with their own compatriots. So this is not a conversation about some people, ethnicities or countries being better than others. It is simply an effort to appreciate the cumulative effect of adverse environments on people's own sense of identity so that development interventions can be better tailored to meet their needs.

#### Implications for development

This interpretation of Dr. Foege's story suggests that "cultural differences" are not to be dismissed or even to be adapted to. They reflect the fundamental sense of identity through which people within a community perceive the world around them,

including the new systems being created by well-meaning development practitioners. This sense of identity is a critical dimension that must be addressed if sustainable progress is to be achieved. In doing so, development practitioners would be wise to keep the following points in mind:

**Do not ignore the subjective side of development**, either by arguing that poor people should take "personal responsibility" for their own lives, or by adopting the similarly naïve view that system improvements alone are sufficient. The former places unproductive and inhumane expectations on those who have not yet reached the "self-aware" stage where considering options and taking responsibility become possible. The

latter defers these inhumane expectations, but only until the proper systems are in place. The reality is that many poor populations will require consistent outside engagement over a much longer period of time.

**Actively invite target populations to see themselves and the world around them from a new, more complex perspective.** Many development projects already describe success in terms of individual transformation rather than aggregate economic measures. Psychometric assessments like the one associated with Loevinger's model could provide the rigor necessary to support their claims. But in prompting these transformations, remember that everyone passes through ego stages in the

same sequence and one cannot “skip steps.”

Recognize that negative behaviors may actually indicate developmental progress. Every ego stage has its upsides and its downsides. For example, someone moving from “impulsive” to “self-protective” can now look out for himself, but may do so to excess—e.g., through corruption. Someone moving from “self-protective” to “conformist” can now identify with social constructs beyond her own family, but may do so to excess—e.g., by taking on an extremism that others find threatening.

Use ego demographics to break down the false barrier of “cultural differences.” Development practitioners may find that populations with similar ego demographic profiles respond to interventions in similar ways, even if they are in conventional terms culturally distinct. This approach may also help identify interventions that have achieved a significant impact for certain types of populations, but for which the impact is rendered statistically insignificant when averaged across all populations for which data is available.

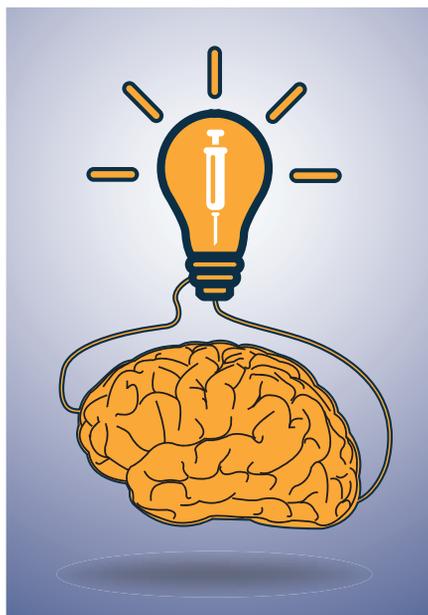
The subjective side of development, captured here using ego demographics, underlies many of today’s most important development issues. In fact, the essence of “inclusion,” which is now a prominent theme in the development conversation, is that one’s ego has expanded enough to identify with everyone else within the community rather than just with people from the same tribe, ethnicity, gender or other such subgroup.

But many will still be uncomfortable bringing ego demographics into the conversation, thinking that it makes value judgments about the attitudes and beliefs of others. But it does not. Analyzing those attitudes and beliefs using long-established models from psychology is different from saying the attitudes and beliefs are “good” or “bad.” They are not good or bad; they just are. Furthermore, the development community’s adoption of tools like ego demographics will ultimately benefit the people the community aims to serve. For all we know, the next doctor coming through the village may not be so tall. 

# Nonprofit or For-Profit?

## ► Finding the right balance for global health research and development.

By **Aarthi Rao**, Program Officer, Results for Development Institute, and **Andrew Robertson**, Visiting Scholar, University of California Center for Emerging and Neglected Diseases



**I**MAGINE YOU’VE come up with a new vaccine candidate that could save the lives of millions of people around the world, most of whom live in developing countries. While the poorer people in these countries might gain the most benefit, middle-class individuals and international travelers are also potential buyers, and the technology used throughout the vaccine’s development and manufacturing might be repurposed for other health products. There is potential to earn a reasonable profit, but the timeline is uncertain and the upfront investment needed is vast.

What is the best vehicle to bring this vaccine product to market? Should you organize a nonprofit product development group to make sure your product reaches those who need it most? Can you rely on donor contributions to cover your costs? Or should you instead incorporate as a for-

profit company and rely on investors to raise the needed capital? If you do, how do you ensure that your vaccine gets to those poor populations with the greatest need? For global health entrepreneurs working to develop technologies needed by the poor, such as new tuberculosis drugs and diagnostics that can be used in low-resource settings, these are serious considerations with significant trade-offs.

Traditionally, the development of global health products, including novel or improved drugs, vaccines and diagnostics, has taken place in the nonprofit sector under the purview of mission-driven product development partnerships (PDPs). Organizations such as the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative, the Medicines for Malaria Venture and the Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics channel donor, government and other contributions to the most promising research and development (R&D) projects within their disease or technology area. They draw from the expertise of a wide range of private, public and nonprofit partners. Close to 30 PDPs have done a great job of galvanizing support for global health R&D and reinvigorating product development pipelines for global health. As of 2011, PDPs had gained regulatory approval for 11 products and had built development portfolios that include dozens of candidates in the early and late stages of development.

So why not continue with the nonprofit PDP model? For one, by expanding the pool of innovators working in global health, more R&D in this area will get done. Hopefully, this would result in more needed products reaching the poor. But perhaps more importantly, funding sources