

Multi-Criteria Decision Aiding in the Less Developed World: A Must Today, More than Ever

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The world has been facing rather radical political and economical moves in the last decade. Although some thinkers of world changes are still astonished by the apparent profound change in paradigm that our generation has experienced, others have been perhaps a little too fast to welcome what is usually denoted by 'Globalization' as a highly desirable and unavoidable process. However, if the advances in science and technology are making communication among humans by far much easier each day, it is no less true that in a large extent of our planet people are living under the hegemony of financial capitalism. At the same time we all have been exposed in our countries, in one way or another, to plagues such as growing consumerism, discrimination based on race, ethnical origin or creed, and terrorism. In a considerable portion of our planet poverty is still eroding the social texture and facilitating the increase of epidemics, hunger, social injustice, and crime. More than ever, we should really assign the best of our energies to make this world a better place to live, for the present and future generations!

It is precisely at this point where Multi-Criteria Decision Aiding can provide decision agents at all levels with a big help to improve the quality of life in our planet. The basis for this is the holistic view of a complex decision problem that is usually associated to a multi-criteria analysis of that problem. Here I rely on my experience in the so called 'less developed world', where I grew and where I presently live. In essence, the socio-psychology of complex decision making is quite similar to what we normally find in the 'developed world', except for the fact that institutions tend to be much less stable and mature in the former than in the latter. In many cases this makes a big difference as corruption or authoritarianism are embedded in a decision process, for instance, may favor non-accountability. In courses I have taught for executives, practicing engineers as well as other professionals in South and Central America I therefore emphasize key elements that are present in the definition of Decision Aiding found in Roy & Bouyssou (1993):

- (i) the need to obtain answers to the questions faced by an intervener in a decision process;
- (ii) the need of clarifying every potential decision; (iii) the need to increase the coherence between the evolution of a decision process, the objectives, and the value system of every intervener in the process.

The imperious necessity of structuring a decision problem and the consequent decision analysis so as to explicitly recognize a multidimensionality of points of view and to provide the process with transparency and public accountability is always clearly understood by people who are so introduced to Multi-Criteria Decision Aiding. At the overall level, these people perceive the ethical principle that may be subjacent to the analysis and the concrete possibility to improve the less developed part of this planet by tackling complex decision processes by Multi-Criteria Decision Aiding. This is far from being a naive look at reality: it is indeed the password for a militancy, a conscious engagement in the effort to improve life on Earth. And the mission of teachers/practioners of Multi-Criteria Decision Aiding can very well be to make that password accessible. For these, Multi-Criteria Decision Aiding is indeed a tool for materializing progressive changes in society.

Reference:

Roy, B. & Bouyssou, D. (1993) Aide Multicritère à la Décision: Méthodes et Cas. Collection Gestion, Ed. Economica, Paris.